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Blackberry Pickers

Evelyn St. Leger

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By Evelyn St. Leger

The Shape of the World

The Blackberry Pickers

The Blackberry Pickers

By

Evelyn St. Leger, psud.

Author of "The Shape of the World," etc.

See

Randolph, Mrs Evelyn S Leger

"Earth's crammed with Heaven,
And ev'ry common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes—
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries."

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The Knickerbocker Press
1912

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To

You Dear

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'T IS hard to say if greater want of skill
Appear in writing or in judging ill;
But of the two, less dangerous is th' offence
To tire our patience than mislead our sense.
Some few in that, but numbers err in this;
Ten censure wrong for one who writes amiss.

. . . . . .

Of all the causes which conspire to blind
Man's erring judgment and misguide his mind,
What the weak head with strongest bias rules,
Is Pride, the never failing vice of fools.
Whatever Nature has in worth denied
She gives in large recruits of needful Pride.
For as in Bodies, thus in Souls, we find
What wants in blood and spirits, swelled with wind.
Pride, where wit fails, steps in to our defence,
And fills up all the mighty void of sense.
If once right reason drives that cloud away,
Truth breaks upon us with resistless day.

Pope.

The Blackberry Pickers

CHAPTER I

THE SCANDAL

> RAGGING SCANDALS.
>
> OFFICER DIPPED IN TREACLE.
>
> ANOTHER GOOD SOLDIER DONE FOR.

THESE and similar announcements in large type greeted the eyes of passersby in the main thoroughfares of London one cold, damp, blustering afternoon when March was at its dreariest best.

The ladies as they drove along twisted their elegant necks, hoping to find a clue on some fluttering page, which failing to do, they turned to each other and wondered:

Who? and
Where? and
Why? and
What?

Curiosity was not gratified until the men came home from their clubs, when they answered in order:

Young Lummond.

Aldershot.

No credit to the regiment.

Mock court martial.

Those not in the "know" whispered many things, and shook their heads, sighing for the good old days, twinkling at the recollection of them, before a soft-hearted, grandmotherly legislation had become the vogue.

Three men at the "Rag" went on discussing the subject much later and a fourth listened in silence; then he walked home with one of the three and told him something rather surprising.

This man repeated it to his wife, and his wife breathed it to Mrs. Cremayne, wife of the General Cremayne who had rented Lummond's property, Flittenbridge, for years and years and years.

The lady who was the recipient of her husband's information said she told Mrs. Cremayne for the very good reason that if it were true, Mrs. Cremayne of all people would certainly know.

Mrs. Cremayne agreed she certainly would, and on her own authority begged the lady to lose no time in acquainting her husband with the falseness of such a rumour.

Then she told the General.

The General said "Faugh!" or something like it, that indicated scorn.

His wife said, "Of course. I knew you 'd feel like that. I said it was n't true."

"True? Cock-and-bull story."

Mrs. Cremayne said meditatively, "Lady Mary was a dear woman." Then with less repose, "Geoffrey Lummond was n't exactly a friend of yours, was he?"

"Not a great friend, but I knew him very well. He was all right, member of my club——"

The story told was this: That Lady Mary, wife of the Hon. Geoffrey Lummond, had had a son, who died when she died, and was buried; the nurse in attendance at the time knew and saw that he was buried with her in the same grave—in fact in the same coffin—in India.

Therefore—according to the nurse—the baby that sailed with its *ayah* and Geoffrey Lummond, and was shipwrecked *en route*, arriving fatherless in England, with a signet ring tied to its sash, purporting to be Master Luke Lummond, heir of Flittenbridge, WAS NOT ANYTHING OF THE KIND.

But for the prominence given to the name in this last ragging affair, the story might never have passed out of the bosom of that worthy, who only resurrected its skeleton in order that it might adorn the feast of gossip suddenly provided by the trial and its advertisement in the daily and nightly papers.

That it was a tiresome story you will, I know, agree, not only because it had a plausible foundation in the fact that one failed to see what purpose

could be served by its invention, but also because, having a certain nastiness about it, there would always be a sense of uncertain stickiness after brushing the mud away.

Mrs. Cremayne was still brushing when the General spoke.

"I told the boy he could come down to us."

"Of course, dear."

"You won't repeat that beautiful tale."

"No."

"There is no need for the children to hear it."

"Oh, dear, no! Certainly not!"

The children ranged from seven to twenty-seven and lived with their parents on the property of which young Lummond was the landlord, who had curiously enough been introduced to his own five years ago by Rachel, the second daughter, after meeting him on a visit to some mutual friends named Haskell.

He was somewhat of a Yahoo in those days and required, in spite of Eton and Balliol, a good amount of polishing.

Rachel's family in a witty vein recommended her to act chamois leather, and the woman in the girl flew out suddenly to meet the boy in the man and "mother him."

The situation, as it stood at the moment of reading these placards, was this: That Luke Lummond cared not a flip of the finger about his disgrace to the regiment, to his family, or his race, but he cared a good deal how Rachel Cre-

mayne would look if he accepted her father's offer that he should go down and stay when the case was over.

He went, not heart-broken but spirit-bruised, and balm of Bethesda or Gilead, or wherever the best balm comes from, was poured without stint on his hurt, and he was ministered to and soothed as often before.

"It is n't your fault!"

"You can't help being clever."

"I think it 's fine!"

Had he heard aright? Yes, she said it again, "I think it 's fine for you to show up such rottenness in the army."

She thought him Fine!
O Loyalty, thy name is Woman!

CHAPTER II

THE MAN AND THE GIRL

THE Lummond affair barely lasted out its nine days' talk. The usual things were said by people of opposite views with, of course, the usual results.

The Colonel and the Adjutant were lauded to the skies by those who approved a good old-fashioned system for keeping up the standard of a regiment; they were equally condemned by others who regarded flogging at school and horse-play in after-life as signs of barbarism, the result of half-human ancestry.

The victim, or the hero, was honestly, openly, and devoutly thankful to be rid of all hypocrisy in the matter of martial ardour.

He never had possessed it; he never, as he now told Rachel, really wanted to be a soldier; in fact, it was her doing entirely that he ever went into the Army at all

The lady gasped, "My doing?" as though she doubted her powers of understanding.

Yes, it seemed it was all due to a conver-

sation they had had one day at the Winyons' soon after he went to Oxford. Did n't she remember?

She closed her eyes. The whole thing drifted back across the intervening years and she saw again young Master Lummond and young Miss Cremayne sitting side by side on a croquet ground, discussing their immediate futures.

Hers had been sketched lightly and easily with such simple things as a house, a husband, and a garden—things that the poorest woman in the world could have, as she pointed out to her listener, only the quality of each in this case must be something "extra special" to suit her.

"Sounds all right," Master Lummond had agreed. "Modern style, I suppose—the house in town, the husband at sea, and the garden in the country, or are they all to be glued together?"

"Together," she had murmured. Quite old-fashioned, she would be miserable leading a separate existence.

Quoth Master Luke to this, "Well, you 've got the house and the garden already; you will all be able to live there as long as you wish. It 's only to find the husband. What sort do you want?"

She thought she wanted a soldier. Her Dad was a soldier, Tom had been a soldier, and altogether she considered soldiers awfully nice. Did n't he?

Master Lummond mused momentarily. Then he decided he should be a soldier. Oxford was

ripping and he could just as well go through his time as an army candidate. What did she think of that arrangement?

Miss Cremayne had not only bowed acquiescence but approved so much that she called him Luke by accident, and he thenceforth called her Rachel of set purpose but with a sweet diffidence as feeling himself unworthy. She went on to say she would not like him to leave Oxford. Those years were worth everything in a man's career, and then, had n't he thought of being a lawyer? Did n't he want to make a lot of money and come back and live on his own?

He had had some such idea, it seemed, long ago, but he had changed since, or thought he had.

His listener pulled a blade of grass and nibbled it. "Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, doctor, lawyer, apothecary, thief—tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor ——"

What was she counting? Why the posts of the railings, and she ended triumphantly by dodging her eye round a bush—"Soldier!"

Now what regiment did he like? She liked Highland Regiments. The "Black Watch" or the "Seaforths." Had he any Scotch blood?

Yes, he had a drop, but not if he had to wear a kilt. Nothing on earth would induce him to wear a kilt!

"Nothing looks so nice."

She did n't really? "What rot!"

He was eyed reflectively. Yes, he would look quite well in a plaid and a bonnet.

This sent him rolling over on the grass laughing. "What awful rot! Women's clothes—a petticoat, a shawl, and a bonnet! Not me!"

He was informed loftily that he did not know what he was talking about. He would be very sorry when he went to the Caledonian ball to find nobody would dance with him. Because nobody would. "Nobody ever dances with a man in trousers, if they 've got the chance of a kilt. Nobody!"

How many times had she tried?

It appeared she had n't tried yet, but she knew she would n't dance with him, and none of her friends would. She did n't know why. It was one of those things she could n't explain. But they just would n't.

This heart-breaking threat only produced the repetition of "A petticoat, a shawl, and a bonnet!"

"And the pipes," she added, her artistic senses realising glory to the full, "don't forget the darling pipes."

Lummond put his hands over his ears. "Don't," he said. "It 's torture only to think of them."

And the lady sighed. "How different we are! To me the pipes are perfectly de-licious."

"Torture!" the man moaned. "Absolute torture!"

So that you see was that——

And after that came a few months' soldiering

and then the scandal, and after that the next thing to do was to help the man shake off the idea of hopeless failure that had fastened on him of late and to strike out in a new direction, proving himself in some other walk in life a success, possibly a brilliant one.

His guide, philosopher, and friend, outwardly sweet, smiling, and sympathetic, was inwardly torn by conflict.

Her father, a general; her brother Tom, late of the Grenadiers, now farmer and sportsman; her uncle, the Admiral; her sister Rose's husband Jack; her friend Mary Winyon's husband Sir Victor—all upheld ragging.

What they said came to this: That in a greater or lesser degree, at some time or other of his life a man gets ragged, and it does him all the good in the world. If he gets badly ragged after leaving school, it shows he needs it badly.

What they maintained came in short sentences like this.

"Fits you for the rough and tumble of life."

"Knocks out the nonsense."

"Rubs off the corners."

"Kicks you into shape."

"Makes you a man."

Rachel had looked at them all as they spoke. Four of these men had wives, three of those wives were happy. She asked her mother's opinion.

Her mother said, "I should think it abominable my dear, left to myself, and I 'm sorry for Luke

from the depths of my soul, but your father says it 's the best training a man can have, and you could n't find a better or a kinder-hearted man than your father."

She asked her aunt.

The aunt said, "It reads awful, my child; really makes one quite ashamed; but your uncle says its nothing to what goes on in the Navy—only the discipline is better there, so we never hear of it. Then look at the men. Where could you find a finer character than my Admiral?"

She asked Rose—one of her own generation would be less Spartan perchance.

Rose said, "Of course I think it sounds horrid, but Jack says if a man can't stand ragging, he 's a rotter."

This fired Rachel more than either of the other opinions.

"Well he is n't a rotter," she said. "He is a deal too clever—that 's really at the bottom of the whole affair, we believe. He liked reading up difficult subjects when the others wanted to play, and they resented his being quiet and wanting to be let alone."

"I know," her sister nodded. "He was n't sociable. He never wanted to do anything anybody else was doing. They all tried to smarten him up but he would n't take advice and he was n't any credit; in fact, he was a nuisance —quite unfit to be a soldier; but as you say he may be too clever. Let him go into business and run his show in his own way."

Tom gave his impression for what it was worth that he 'd be sorry for any woman who married a man that had never been "ragged" and jolly well "ragged" too. She 'd have her work cut out for her, and get all the kicks and none of the ha'pence. And he ended up with, "Look at Mother Mary Monica."

"You don't think——"

A nod—"pampered all his life, never been trained, no backbone, morally, of course."

So she asked Mary.

And Lady Winyon in her gentle way said, "I can't bear to think it 's necessary, but when one looks at the men who have gone through it—everybody always said 'it' you notice—and then at the men who have never gone through that sort of thing, one can't help feeling perhaps it is good. I know Vic says says so, though of course he also says they go too far sometimes."

Rachel probed.

"Yes, did n't he shoot a man once?"

"Only threatened, dear. He had had enough and pulled out a pistol, saying he would shoot the next man who touched him. I believe it took effect. He says they never worried him after that."

Rachel sat silent and thought.

"It was n't playing the game." She had heard that said, and certainly Sir Victor, though nice, was not the very nicest man of their acquaintance. He was not anybody's ideal that she had ever heard.

So there she was, balanced between this weight of evidence on the one side and on the other, and Luke looking to her to champion his cause and support him in what had really been a martyrdom.

Thinking, thinking how best to help her boy out of the slough of despond in which the recent past seemed likely needlessly to blacken his future, there crossed her mind one of those odd little bits we meet now and then in a book, which, once read, stow themselves away in some back drawer of the brain and then spring out suddenly, presenting us with a key that fits.

She gave it to Lummond now. He agreed it was odd.

She had hoped he would say it was apt.

There is no more reason why you should remember your previous life than that your toe should remember its previous corns.—*Alteruter.*

CHAPTER III

THE CANDLE OF THE LORD

AND to think we've arrived as far on as this in the book without your knowing a word about Anna!

Anna was a man with an English mother—that made him nice; and a foreign father—that made him interesting. His name was—well I really can't tell you, because I really don't know. He was always called Anna by his equals, Herr Anna by his unequals, and Anna, "the Analyst," by the children.

I believe letters from abroad reached him with some flourish of this sort:

"An den Hochwohlgeborenen Herrn Graf von Schmerz und Glücksheim,"

which sounded very fine and large, and gave the house an air of distinction in possessing such a personage beneath its roof.

Anna had been at Eton with the General, had lost sight of him during their thirties, and had found him again in their forties. The General

one day asked him to dine and sleep and be introduced to wife and family. Anna came—and never went away.

I don't know how it happened, or what Mrs. Cremayne thought of the arrangement. It 's just one of those things people did in the last century without causing any surprise or disturbance.

Anna kept the same bed-room, one on the south front. He also lived in the little book-room off the library and played in an outhouse, which he did up at enormous expense and made absolutely fascinating.

His habit of analysing made him first of all adviser-in-general to the neighbourhood. After that he was an architect, a sculptor, a painter, a musician, a writer, a reviewer, an orator, a hewer of wood, as his axe hanging on the wall testified, a drawer of water—*vide* the pump, chief feature in his "courtyard"— an art in himself albeit an amateur, a Jack of all trades and master of none.

He was also a dear. The English mother had seen to that before he was seven. He was also eccentric. The foreign relations had seen to that at seventeen. And without him the Cremayne household would not now have known itself.

Rachel went to him at all times and on all subjects. He was her sort of Father Confessor in ordinary, the Bishop, her godfather, being Confessor-in-Chief. And now to him she brought

her own difficulties in life with the added difficulties of Luke.

What was to be done with him, what, and how much for him? How far must he be thrown on his own resources; how long allowed, for the purposes of chastening, to regard himself as a failure; how soon might she encourage him with her own belief that

> Men may rise on stepping stones
> Of their dead selves to higher things.

Anna manipulated handful of clay the while he listened, pipe in mouth.

Rachel discoursed quietly on the facts of the case as they were known publicly through the press, not as she knew them privately and confidentially at first hand.

Anna grasped the difficulty of her own position as she talked. All unwittingly she was defending Luke from a possible charge of cowardice.

She wanted Anna to say he had been a brave man to act as he did; she longed for such support in her own half-hearted opinion of him that he was true and noble, as would make it whole and invulnerable from attack.

She waited. Anna puffed at his pipe.

"You do think he acted right, don't you, Anna?"

"I think he acted according to his—character. He is always characteristic in everything he does, as you, Mademoiselle, are always picturesque."

Rachel laughed in the way that meant you are not going to throw me off the scent like that.

"You mean," she said, making straight for the centre of things, "it would have been better if his character had been different and therefore his actions different?"

"Then it would have been a different man—" Puff.

She tried to sit back in her chair and feel patient.

"As he has got that character, you think he acted——"

"In accordance with it—" Puff, puff.

"Then he could n't really have acted differently. He did act right—for him—did n't he?"

"I don't think he could have acted otherwise."

"That 's an immense relief," she sighed, emphasising thereby a slight exaggeration of words, "an immense relief, Anna, for if any one is true to themselves—well, they can't be truer than that, can they?"

She laughed now, implying she was satisfied and did not really need an answer.

She got none, yet had a vague sense of disappointment.

"Now as to his future, he is thinking of the bar."

Anna nodded.

"He is so clever I am sure that will really suit him."

"What does Mr. Haskell say?"

"I have n't asked him."

"What do his own people say?"

"Oh, he has n't asked them. He does not care a bit what they think. He says they are no help to him."

"And you are——"

"I don't suppose I am really, but he likes having some one to talk to. Anna, it 's a dreadful thing for a boy to have no brothers and sisters, don't you think so?"

"I never missed them."

She laughed. "I forgot. It must be awful to be an only child."

"You 've never tried—how do you know?"

She laughed again. "Well, don't you think Luke has got a legal mind?"

"Go on swinging your foot, will you? pretty little study——"

"Anna! He has got to be a very fine man, I feel it in my bones. How can we help him best? Do think."

The man put his pipe in his pocket. "There, look at that. Think it 's like——?"

"Just like— Me to the life!"

"Only your outside. All we can ever touch."

"Well, I should n't like a model of my inside," and she creased her nose, then lapsed into silence.

"All we can ever touch," she repeated the words slowly. "Is that so?"

A nod of his head.

"But you believe we can help each other?"

"I believe we can interfere with each other. It may be for good, it may not."

"You help me!"

He shook his head. "The help you get is inside you. Nothing outside can really help."

"Then why do I come to you?"

"Because you are highly sensitive to your environment." He paused, looking at her with bright eyes under overhanging brows. Then he quoted, "Consciousness is the wonderful candle of the Lord, that reveals all marvels and makes all that we call knowledge."

She thought a moment, then softly, "I am conscious when other candles are bigger and brighter than mine." She smiled ravishingly. "And Luke?" She clasped her hands and hesitated questioningly.

"And Luke."

She went away presently saying to herself, "Is it lit, is it lit?" Nevertheless she was quite, quite satisfied.

"Anna gives me something lovely to take away," she said, "every time I come."

The wonderful candle of the Lord—the wonderful candle of the Lord.

CHAPTER IV

THE HASKELLS

AND now perhaps you will kindly begin loosening a shoe-lace, that is if you will step back with me a few odd years or so while I introduce you to the Haskells.

Robert Haskell's dream was realised at last. The dream that often keeps good men awake long after they should be asleep and sometimes in after-life is known to be a nightmare.

Robert had often dreamed of a little home of his own. Not an original dream—just a tea-kettle fireside, domestic happiness dream with very few wants—but those few strong. Well, it had all come to pass. It was all there. She was there—just the one woman in all the wide world out of all the hundreds and thousands and millions of the female sex. She had come to play her part in the pretty scene he had set for her, and she was called Ruth,—the lady of the house, the angel of the hearth, the light of his eyes, the very joy of his heart, and many other pleasant things beside.

Robert's life, since his coming of age, had not

been the idle, easy, luxurious life of his many friends. His father had died when he was just beginning his third year at Oxford, leaving to his care his mother, his sister, and a legacy of debt with a property mortgaged up to the hilt. From that date youth and fun and lightheartedness had seemed to slip off into a trance that lasted so many years Robert feared they must all be dead. Then Ruth came, and with her magic wand touched the greyness and the dimness in which he was living and turned all the dulness into a golden light where by and bye Hope joined with Faith and presently brought forth Love, which was the beginning of miracles for these two such as we dearly like to see.

Robert was twenty-eight when he began to dream of Ruth, a young man with a weight on his shoulders, eking out a pittance at the bar that he might keep his mother and sister from missing some of those "necessities" dear to the female heart; getting for his pains constant grumbling reminders from the one and a sweet wound-healing devotion from the other, which combination had kept him fairly balanced hitherto.

When Ruth came into this musty, dusty, cobwebby, loving, dreary, legal atmosphere, she came as a breath of moor air—fresh and bracing as a lung-filling incentive towards Honour, Work, and Duty. Nothing soft and languorous to make him long for the yielding delights of down-stuffed cushions or an easier way of living. On the con-

trary, she made him feel that what he had done was as nothing to what he could do, that his armour must be buckled tighter, his sword grip must be firmer, his right arm surer, and his seat in the saddle of that prancing jade called Fortune must be secure with the ease that comes of alternately riding such hacks as he was wont to mount at times, dubbed Prosperity and Adversity. She herself—in his own mind only mark you—was the spur.

Twenty-eight when he began to dream, thirty when the dream shaped itself into a practical possibility, and thirty-three when the curtain rang up on that stage of proceedings with which we are now concerned.

Somewhere about the year 1897 a little house in Westminster became the Haskells' home, chosen with great care and an eye to the future on the part of Mrs. Haskell. Robert had thought of West Kensington or Campden Hill as suitable to their present needs and means but was over-ruled by his wife, who gave many specious reasons against either and reserved to herself the pleasure of divulging the true one when they should be spending that first bl ssful evening together within sound of Big Ben's chimes.

"Do you hear that?" she said with lifted finger as nine strokes boomed away into silence.

The man smiled amused acquiescence.

"You know what it says? Something like this:

'All through this hour
Christ be my guide,
Kept by thy power
No foot shall slide.'

So we are safe, you see, till the next time it strikes.' Every day I hear it I shall say those words for you because you may be too busy to say them for yourself, and every night when you are walking home or later when you hear them, you are to say those words for me. See?"

Robert nodded in a puff of smoke.

"Is that why you were so bent on taking this house, superstitious woman?"

"Don't call me superstitious."

"Why, darling?"

"Because it 's unfair."

"Why?"

"Because I 'm not superstitious and even if I were, that 's not superstition."

"Why is n't it?"

"Oh, Robert, don't be silly, or I shall go upstairs."

"Why, darling?"

Ruth began to laugh. "Try and say something else."

"But why, dear?"

She leaned forward and shook him. "Idiot! Stop saying 'Why' to everything."

"Why, my sweet?"

"Because if you will, I will tell you why I

really wanted this house, or rather neighbourhood."

"Wh——"

"No, say that once again and you remain in ignorance of all the workings of my brain."

Robert puffed at his pipe in a delicious content with things as they were at that very precise moment. Ruth, sitting by his knee facing him and emphasising her words with the soft impress of her fingers, made his blood tingle quietly.

"I know already," he said; "you don't suppose my brain cannot follow yours."

"Well, Mr. Clever?"

"In the bottom of your heart, Madam, you wanted to hear that old clock say your prayers for you when you forgot them *or*, having greater faith in yourself than me, when I forgot mine."

Ruth said, "Poof!" with an extra dig at his knee. "The real reason is the situation. I feel, Sir, it will be most handy for you when you are—M.P."

Robert laughed and dropped his pipe in his lap. "M.P. on nothing a year!"

"M.P. and Q.C. or K.C., and P.C.; in fact, any of the things you are going to be, simply demand a habitation in Westminster. You could n't live anywhere else and do it in the time."

"Dear child!"

"Oh, yes, it 's all very well to 'dear child' me. Wait till this time—what are you now? Thirty-three—well, wait till you are forty-three and see

if I am not a true prophet. K.C. first, then M.P., then P.C."

"Then Lord C., no doubt!"

"Chancellor? No, I don't think about that, it 's too obvious." Robert laughed again.

"Do you think you could come down from the realms of fancy and meet me for a few minutes on the plains of fact?"

"Try me."

The pipe was filled again and lit in silence.

"Well, to begin with, out of our settled income I allow my mother two hundred a year. It 's not absolutely necessary to do so, I know, but she has only got enough of her own to live just comfortably and this little extra gives her luxuries. Then Madge has——"

"I know, another fifty to give her luxuries."

"Right. And you are to have the same for the same purpose and fifty more for cab money, which with your own dress allowance will, I hope——"

"Robert!"

"I am going to keep myself out of bar earnings."

"And the housekeeping and the rent, and amusements and charity?"

"All out of the bar."

"And what will be left for luxuries for you?"

"Don't you be afraid. Number one is in no danger of being forgotten." But he smoked without looking at her.

"Robert!"

"Um."

"All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, you know."

"But my name is n't Jack, you see. The system agrees awfully well with Robert."

"Darling, do you think I am going to let you do all the work and have none of the fun? You simply have n't kept a penny piece for yourself—I sha 'n't——"

"I opened an account for you at the bank to-day, that is to be your own private affair to do with just as you jolly well please, and that amount will be paid to you quarterly, so you will always know how you stand. The housekeeping money shall be paid you by cheque the first of every month, and if you can manage on that for the present, it will be an enormous help to me, as then we need never discuss L.S.D. or have tiresome money difficulties to annoy us when perhaps my liver is out of order!"

"And," slowly, "luxuries for you don't even exist."

"My dear, I have still got to justify my self-indulgence in snatching my luxury first."

Ruth's eyes were shining and she blinked quickly to prevent his seeing too much.

"I shall save every penny I can to help you fight your first election."

"You will kindly spend that money as a woman should spend it whose husband is passing rich and whose life is free from care. It will all be good for trade—that 's where number one comes in. *Comprenez vous ça, mon ange?*"

The woman shook her head. She was not to be deceived.

Robert put his hand on her shoulder. "There 's only one thing I like to have your complete agreement in, sweetheart, and that is about my mother and Madge. It 's not really necessary, I know. They could get on without my help and you have a perfect right to——"

"How dare you insult me, sir? How dare you? Do you think we could ever hope to succeed bravely and boldly in public if we failed meanly and miserably in private? I love you for everything about you, but I absolutely adore you for giving generously where you get nothing in return. Yes, I know, we won't speak of it." She took his hand and kissed it, holding it against her face, while Big Ben boomed ten of the clock. Then she kissed it again, "Did you say it?"

A fleeting likeness to Old Adam twitched the corner of the man's mouth. "I can't quite remember the words, dear, but I said it in spirit. Now, time for Luxury to get her beauty sleep. I have got some papers to read."

"I won't be called a luxury," said the woman, standing and leaning over him, "or some day in a sacrificing mood of abnegation you will think you can do without me."

"Very well. Good-night, my bare necessity."

CHAPTER V

BOTH HE——

L'HOMME propose.

Within three years of their marriage and the foregoing conversation Robert Haskell was prevailed upon to contest a by-election in a rotten borough, and after a thrilling fight he won the seat from his radical opponent by just seventeen votes.

And the day after the declaration of the poll, Ruth, his wife, was carried a helpless, paralysed cripple into their little house in Westminster.

Dieu dispose.

She had been with him through everything, through all the changing scenes of life that make up the interest of a barrister's career, through the gradual giving way of five guinea briefs to ten guinea briefs, which in their turn had one blissful day been swallowed up by a "twenty and one," celebrated by an orgie, *i.e.*, a hasty summons of Ruth's brother and Robert's sister to a little dinner at Prince's followed by a play and supper at the Savoy.

How happy they had been and how assured the future looked!

And then that other day following a slack week, when his clerk had burst upon him the announcement that a thumping big fee was on its way.

There was no doubt. His name was already on the papers; it might arrive any minute; and every knock on the door that day from two o'clock till six meant—only those who have eaten out their hearts in Temple Chambers can know just all it did mean.

But the brief never came. A telephone message stayed it at the last moment and Haskell's name was crossed out and another man's, a friend of the client's, was written in.

"It was quite right. Perfectly right," Robert told Ruth, "and a bit of luck for the other chap." But it was depressing after a bad week.

Then suddenly work got brisker. A Judge of the High Court commended his handling of a difficult case and summed up in his favour, two big firms took to briefing him regularly, and smaller fry grew more polite.

Ruth's housekeeping cheques grew larger, but she laid by the store for a rainy day and waited.

Then when least expecting a change, he was asked to stand for the rotten borough. No one wanted to represent the place; it would be a walk-over for the Radical; would he step in and fight?

He consulted Ruth. Ruth said "yes." He explained it would take all his ready cash, might

lose him a lot of work, might, in fact, play the very deuce with everything just as he was beginning to make his name at the bar. For a day and a night he was a pessimist. Then Ruth's optimism prevailed and he agreed to take the risk and stand to lose or win.

It was not a costly proceeding, and his funds, augmented by H. K. savings, held out—but on the polling day, as they went about the street shaking hands and talking, while the Radicals jeered and jested in triumphal anticipation of certain victory, a motor-car swerved round a corner silently. Robert jumped to one side, catching Ruth's arm as he did so, but the front wing of the car also caught her and—God knows what happened!

Such a little thing and done in a moment. Struck down at his side laughing and alive—picked up as good as dead.

The light of his eyes and the joy of his heart, Ruth, his wife, his darling.

But it was Ruth won his seat for him after all! It was about four o'clock when the accident happened and a crowd of loafers collected round the polling station stood waiting for "something" powerful enough, which might induce them to exercise their right of citizenship. Those who had voted were the extremists on either side but they were not by a long way in the majority, though so far as it could be known the Radicals had already far out-polled the Conservatives.

Robert, a doctor from the crowd, and the motor-

man lifted Ruth gently and carried her up the street to the little inn. A long procession interested and diverted followed. She opened her eyes once and seeing those many rough and toil-worn faces round her made a sudden movement with her hand. "Don't mind me," she said. "Go and vote for my husband, vote for Mr. Haskell." Then she lost consciousness for hours interminable.

"Did yer 'ear that, mates?"

A nod and a growl.

"Well 'oo 's it ter be?"

The women came out from their doors and joined the crowd round the now neglected motor asking questions.

"Pore little lady! O, pore little lady! and she in my 'ouse only yesterday, asking me to 'elp get her 'usben in."

"Did she now," said another woman, "I believe yer, for when she called on me, she spoke as one lady to another—'We ain't got votes yet, Mrs. Bonn'.—Oh, yes, she got my name right enough.—'And I 'm not sure we want 'em', says she, 'so long as we get the best men into Parliament.'

"'And 'oo 's ter know 'oo 's best, mam,' says I.

"'Well,' says she with a laugh, 'you must ask your 'usben, Mrs. Bonn—'e 'll know, of course.'

"''E know,' I says, 'why blest if 'e did n't say this morning 'e should n't vote at all—one was just as bad as t ' other.' Pore little lady!"

"Pore little lady," agreed the audience, then

turned their heads towards the Inn door as a barmaid appeared calling for Jim.

"Jim, I say, 'ave you voted yet?"

"I was jest athinking 'bout it."

"Well, I 've 'ad enough of your thinking. You 'll be doing now if you please, and if Mr. 'Askell don't get in to-night, I go right back 'ome to mother. D' you 'ear that? If Mr. 'Askell don't get in to-night——"

"Steady on!" said the man from the pavement, "I 've on'y got one vote."

"And so 's Sam only got one vote, so 's Bill only got one vote, so 's everybody only got one vote, but if all those votes ain't used right, the wrong man 'll get in sure as my name 's Evangelina Took, and if you 've any kind of idea of altering that fact, you 'd best start whippen' up them daisy crowd as said they would n't vote at all."

This was greeted with that peculiar "booing" sound which denotes the intellectual Radical when supported by numbers.

"That ain't argument, Mr. Shuffler," said the barmaid haughtily, quoting from the candidate at a recent meeting, and crossing her arms vigorously rather above her waist. "Requires no intelligence to make that noise; a cow could beat yer!"

The women pushed to the front and asked for news of the pore lady. "Was it true she did n't know any one; was 'er 'ead broke; 'ad n't she spoke at all since she fell?"

The barmaid gave a glowing and somewhat

dramatic description of Ruth's few pathetic words before lapsing into unconsciousness.

"Just a woman, bless her, same as you and me, dears, thinking of 'er 'usben afore 'erself. Tell you what, girls, let 's drive this 'lection through our way. We 've 'ad Rads in for years, what good 's it done us? Look at our laundry wages. Let 's 'ave a change! Let 's 'ave 'Askell and try 'im!"

"Hurray!" said the foremost women. "Let 's 'ave a lark!"

"The men 'ave 'ad it their way for years," said the barmaid. "What good 's it done us? We don't 'ave no say in politics."

"Politics ain't for women," said a brave man.

"'Ome politics are," said the barmaid, "or w'ere 'd you all be?"

"Hurray!" said the women again, mustering in stronger force, "Hurray!" But the barmaid put her finger to her lips and nodded backwards to the house. "She can't 'ear," she said, "still we don't want to make no disturbance, but ladies," here she leaned forward and spoke with force and intensity, "shall we in three hours change the poll and make Wrottonbro' a sensation?—or shall we sit still an' bide and let it go as it 's always gone, in the men's way? Which is it ter be, 'Askell or Trotness?"

The audacity of the proposal took the breath of the audience for three or four seconds, then the booing jeers began to sound nasty.

The barmaid looked scornfully over the noisy

crew, and the women, with a dawning sense of power breaking in upon them, tumultuously cried, "'Askell for ever!"

"Quietly does it," said the barmaid. "Wheedle them first. If that fails, no supper prepared! Now ladies, every one of us will vote to-night for that little dear's 'usben as she asked us to do, an' shame on the woman or the girl that does not send a man to the poll before eight o'clock. Be off now an' we 'll meet termorrer and celebrate our victory. We 'll show what we can do when we try—but remember, wheedle if you can. Quietly does the trick—'Askell for ever! but don't sing too loud till termorrer!"

She waved her hand and an excited, fevered throng of her own sex swept off in different directions.

She still stood calm and majestic till the pavement cleared, then she said softly, "Jim, I 'm off duty till eight; would you like me to walk with you, dear?"

But Jim put his hands in his pockets and started up the street whistling gaily.

The woman's eyes twinkled at the corners. She watched him unmoved and in silence. Then she stepped round a pillar and sitting down on the bench, pulled some crochet cotton and a hook out of her pocket.

She could not see the street, nor could she be seen therefrom; her position would want finding out.

She hummed a little song the while she worked a shell; then as a shadow fell across her, she stretched the thing on her knee and looked at it sideways, critically.

"Did you call, Miss?"

It was the voice of the shadow.

" 'Ow! Is that you? No, I did n't call."

"I 'appened to be passin'," said the man, "I thought I 'eard yer——"

The pattern was stretched again.

"Could'n yer come out?" in a tone as of sudden inspiration. "I—I 've bin an' changed my coat for yer."

The woman looked up. "Why so yer 'ave! yer do look smart! I 'd like to walk with yer, dear. Where shall we go?" popping the crochet shell into her pocket.

"Wherever yer like," said the man linking his arm in hers.

As unto the bow the cord is,
So unto the man is woman.
Tho' she bends him she obeys him,
Tho' she leads him yet she follows,
Useless each without the other.

Longfellow.

CHAPTER VI

AND SHE

UNIONIST majority—Seventeen!

The women were wild with delight. They had captured their men the previous evening, that band of would-be non-voters, and had urged, cajoled, or driven them to the polling station between the hours of six and eight.

In the morning they were mad with a newly acquired sense of power, and the triumph of success achieved, tempered at the same time by an over-flowing sympathy for the bitter trouble of their new Member and his wife, whom they suddenly regarded as somehow belonging now to them.

Their good feeling was shown by giving up their dinner-hour's rest and gossip to proceed silently and solemnly behind the ambulance carriage conveying Ruth from the Inn to the station and thence to town.

They made no noise. Nothing jarred on Robert's overwrought nerves. They waved their handkerchiefs to him, some shook his hand, some

cried, "God bless you, Sir! Come back soon and bring our little lady with you." The barmaid was formally introduced and Robert gathered he was meant to understand how it was entirely due to her influence that Wrottonbro' had agreed to return him rather than his opponent, who had expected to walk over.

Then the victor in this brief contest steamed towards the goal of ambition—Westminster, but the laurels were already faded and the glory of the fight buried in dust and ashes. The life of the woman he loved was in danger and a few hours more would tell him the best or the worst.

His own doctor arrived with the specialist at the time appointed, and after consultation the opinion they gave was not re-assuring.

She might recover, but she was paralysed for the time being. Her brain was quite clear and her sight was not impaired. She might get back the use of her arms any day and of course it was possible—miracles happened every day. Yes, the big man would gladly meet any one else Mr. Haskell liked to suggest; he would be quite wise in getting other advice but——

Other opinions were mere repetitions of the first. The youngest and most rising man of science agreed with those far on in age and experience that chance of recovery was slight, and to this slender hope Robert clung with the sort of faith that ought to remove mountains.

One man, white-haired and fatherly, put his

hand on Robert's shoulder. "We can do little, Mr. Haskell," he said, "you can do much. Make her happy and you may make her well. Do you understand? Mind triumphing over matter. It 's a big order, and you are young and lusty. Life will not be easy for you, nor yet for her."

Then as he turned off on his heel,

"Good-bye. Don't make it damnable."

That was the day on which Robert took his seat in the House. Yet in spite of this it was also the day on which he most keenly felt that across his life might be written the word "Ichabod."

For it had come, the day so long talked of, the day that was to see the fulfilment of one of Ruth's most cherished ambitions—the day she was to sit in the gallery and see the new Member take his seat. Well, it had come—and *Dieu dispose*, it was hard to acquiesce in such disposition.

He dined at home, seizing a moment of dull debate that he might satisfy himself of Ruth's condition, also tell her briefly how he felt in the House, of how many people had asked after her, of the kindly sympathy shown him in several unexpected quarters, and generally to make her feel her importance was far beyond law and politics and everything else to him. Bless her!

A couple of months later Haskell found himself face to face with an almost impossible position. Love was as strong as ever, but Hope was getting faint.

Humanly speaking, Ruth's recovery was still a long way off, and the words of the great specialist came back to him now and again with a force and meaning he had hardly recognised at the time.

"Life will not be easy for you, nor yet for her." He could feel the pressure of the hand on his shoulder and hear again the words, "Don't make it damnable."

One night at this time the House rose early. Haskell heard the policeman's cry of "Who goes Home" still ringing in his ears as he walked away in the opposite direction, out on to the embankment, in a kind of half-furious desire to be alone and think. Up and down, up and down, from Cleopatra's Needle to the corner where Boadicea drives her chariot. Back again—to and fro—to and fro, smoking hard—thinking hard—and possibly even unconsciously praying hard.

It was a fine night with a chill in the air and the stars were brilliant. Robert saw and felt none of these things. He was fighting a fight with the invisible, and before daybreak victory would have to be on one side or the other. Flesh or Spirit? Which was to prevail? Just a little slackening of his moral fibre, a catching at happiness, no matter how caught, a drifting along with an easy tide flowing ambition's way. Success, as the world deems success, at the end—and Ruth's accident, an excuse for all shortcomings, all failures, all disappointments.

And what would her life be? God! what could it be anyway? To lie like a log—for always, as long as life lasted. To lie like a log summer and winter, spring and autumn, to lie on that bed unable to move, unable to go out when he and all the world and young blood called, unable to ride with him ever again, unable to hear him speak in the House, unable to attend all the functions they had planned, unable ever to be with him again or do anything with him ever again. He would be alone always—always.

A little faint whisper stole into his ear, "There are others. She is not the only woman."

Not too faint to be heard, listened to, attended to. "Others" romped round in his upheaved mind for he did not know how long. It was a beguiling moment made practicably possible with the subtle apology he would give the Great Judge: "The woman Thou gavest me—failed." That would be unanswerable, men being as they were—and always had been—just men. A sound like a sigh or a sob came up from the river, and though Haskell was deaf and blind to all outside his inner self, yet this roused him, because it ousted those "others" and re-instated Ruth almost automatically.

He loved his wife devotedly—no, passionately perhaps described his feelings best. He could not, he could not do without her. She could not do without him. What was to happen?

He sat down on a corner of a bench not already

occupied by a fellow sufferer, stuffed his hands in his pockets, and faced the position.

Himself on one side, possessed by the demon of work, with "no time" for other attractions. The bar all day and politics all night would leave a man little spare energy for anything.

Ruth on the other side, fretting—silently perhaps—worse still, possibly "resigned"; always in pain, of mind if not of body, always beyond his power to help her, always up in that one room, alive and yet as good as dead. "God," he said at the back of his brain, "what do you expect us to do? What do you think poor mortals are capable of?"

He got up, lit another cigar, and paced slowly back to Boadicea. Would an answer come, was it possible to bear such trouble as this and not be broken utterly?

Ruth! Ruth! He cried for her in an agony, knowing that never again—called he ever so softly as heretofore—would she be able to come.

Big Ben struck midnight but it sounded like Ruth! Ruth! every time, and in the silence following the last call he swore it should be Ruth all his life. Ruth first. Ruth last. Faithful, Loyal, and True. Ah, how easy it had been to swear fidelity and keep it with Ruth, just that one woman out of the hundreds and thousands there are in the world—just that one by his side, sharing in everything with him—and how difficult now! All the others would be there

always and Ruth would be the one woman absent.

Faithful, Loyal, and True. He would like to be so—but was it possible? If the cases had been reversed, if he had been laid low and Ruth free to go about—Bah! Faithful, Loyal, and True. Why did the words ring in his head like this, where had they come from? Was this the answer to his question? Were mortals capable of being just this? It meant so much. Not one big devil fought and vanquished for all time. He remembered vaguely how as a boy he had fancied himself in piously romantic moments a St. George spearing the dragon under the nursery table and enabled by that one deed to pose as a saint for ever more. But in life the dragon was hydra-headed if he cut it off in one place, it would appear in another.

He walked over the bridge, feeling the same thoughts had met him each time he turned on the embankment, and hoping a definite decision would come to him across the water.

He stood for long looking back at the Houses of Parliament, watching the river flowing beneath him, yet without seeing either. The one thing that occupied his mind was a vision of a man such as he would like to be. He knew so well the sort of man—but was it possible? Knowing himself to be the sort he was, could he ever hope to be that other? He would have to change so fundamentally, and for himself he did not want to change, but for Ruth he did—only how—How?

When the Westminster chimes told him it was two o'clock, he threw away the end of his last cigar and with it all indecision—all uncertainty. He chucked the weed in his fingers away and walked briskly towards home.

It was finished. The devil was beaten this time, for the man he would like to be had said quite distinctly and plainly to the man he was, "This kind can come forth by nothing but by Prayer and Fasting."

Softly heard, it was also listened to, and lent an attentive ear.

Then it was he had thrown the weed away and without it quite unconsciously had walked the streets till four A.M., when he let himself in with a latch-key.

Please take off your shoes.——

He bolted the door, turned off the light in the hall, and walked upstairs. The night nurse was standing on the landing outside Ruth's door, a grim figure of protesting disapproval. Something in Robert's face as he came up level with her, made her own change its expression and her muscles unbent.

"I beg your pardon, Sir, but I can't get Mrs. Haskell to sleep. She 's fretting her heart out."

Robert brushed past her and pushed open the door. Only a night-light was burning and he stepped gently up to the horrid, narrow, little bed. He could scarcely see, but he could feel, and he

knelt down and put his face against the one on the pillow.

A long silence, and then, "Darling, I can't bear it. I can't bear it. I have tried, but—if only I could die!"

He turned her face a little with his hands and put his lips to her ear. "I did not think I could bear it either," he said. "But if you will help me, I am going to help you—and—it 's all going—to be—splendid!"

The hot tears Ruth had not let fall now welled over and she could not even wipe them away. Robert pulled out his handkerchief and in the dim light carefully selected the best corner without a word.

"I have thought it all out. I have been walking about on the embankment or goodness knows where since eleven o'clock, and I know just what it 's going to be for—both of us."

"You did n't know that I was possessed of seven devils."

"That all? I put it at much more."

"You did n't know!"

"I did n't know, but I ventured to judge you foolishly by myself. I have been wrestling with seventy-two."

"And how many can you—?"

"All of them!"

"Robert!"

"Yes. I have learned the trick—at least I have been told it."

"Who told you?"

"A man I met the other side of Westminster Bridge."

"What man? Some one you know well?"

"Only by sight."

"Then who is he and how did he come to speak to you?"

"He is a man, I hope some day to have the pleasure of introducing to you, and he spoke to me because he saw I was in a difficulty."

"Oh! I suppose he was a clergyman."

The laugh that Robert gave without thinking brought in the nurse. "I can't have this," she began, "I can't have my patient——"

"Your patient will be asleep in less than ten minutes if I know anything about her and if you will have the goodness not to interrupt my methods—" Robert indicated the door and the nurse took the hint.

"I saw the light go out hours and hours ago, Robert. You don't know how wicked I am—angry, rebellious, jealous, suspicious, and hateful."

"I don't wonder you are angry or rebellious. Those are not devils. They belong to baffled Nature and will probably die the death in due time, but you need never be jealous or suspicious, and you could not possibly ever be hateful."

"Darling, I am——"

"Without cause?"

"There will be causes—plenty, and I have made up my mind"— the voice was almost a sob—

"never, never to ask questions; to lie here in silence, and never worry you; just try to be patient and resigned—and I expect"— two large tears rolling over the edge—"I expect I shall hang on for years."

The best corner of the handkerchief was found again and applied.

"You shall have it whichever way you like, little woman, but I thought you would help me in everything. I want you to—if you will. I will tell you how when we have more time. And as I shall have to work hard and be so occupied, I want you to be sure and ask me any questions, at any time, and on any subject. It will save me a lot of worry, as I shall not have to load my memory with trifles to tell you, knowing that you will ask about them if you want to. Don't ever be suspicious for a moment, tell me what you feel always, and let me clear away the bugbear."

"Robert, you are an angel! Will you tell me who the man was you met and what he said?"

Robert laughed for the second time that night, but more quietly, not to attract the "Griffin."

"Oh, woman, I will not tell you that man or his secret now, but I will some day."

"That 's the first question I have asked!"

"And the only one I refuse to answer—because I am not sure enough yet of my own knowledge of him. He may be a fraud. See? Now anything else?"

"Yes. Some day—some day when the newness

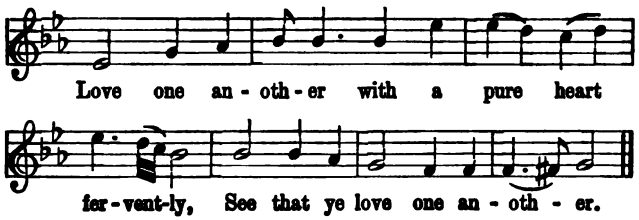
has worn off, when you have got accustomed to my being here like this—there may be something that if I knew——"

"You shall never know."

"But if it is there, I should be sure to know, and I—should mind."

"There shall never be anything for you to mind—so help me, God."

His face was hidden in her hair. The sound like a sob stifled was not Ruth's, nor her's the scalding drop that burnt through the lace on to her shoulder.



CHAPTER VII

AND THEIR FRIENDS

THE Cremaynes were in town for the season and like most people in the social-political world were interested in the new Member for Wrottonbro'.

He was good to look at for one thing; his clothes were always just right for another. He had a charming little air of deference when speaking to women, he also had a twinkle in his eye—and yet was the victim of a domestic tragedy which procured him much sympathy even from his own sex.

To Rachel he seemed just exactly what a man should be—not for what she saw and knew of him as others in the world, but for what she learned of him in secret from the woman he adored.

And there grew up in her mind a seeming parallel between two such apparently opposite natures as Luke Lummond and Robert Haskell.

She could not say what gave birth to the idea, but there it was, and if—if only Luke would grasp it too—Luke, who was so delightfully clever—Luke, who was going to be the coming man—she

knew it for she felt it in her bones—if to all his own possessions he could add that indefinable something that the one had and so many lacked, it would just make Luke different from the common herd in the way that she would love him to be different.

For the moment Rachel had a good many admirers and enjoyed life to the full, but she evinced not the slightest desire for matrimony. No one stirred any depths of feeling in her and she frequently wondered whether something were missing in her constitution or merely lying dormant till the right man appeared.

So far the only male object of interest to her outside her own family was "their Landlord."

He did interest he because they had so much in common, and there was so much really that each could teach the other—he did not always wish to be taught, of that she was quite aware, but a nature like his, she felt, only demanded a little extra diplomacy from a nature like hers, and with such understanding the friendship grew and flourished.

Luke had many loves—each one desperately serious while it lasted, and Rachel knew the history of each in turn by heart and counselled and philosophised in a way that would have been impossible had her own feelings been ever so slightly involved.

There was no disguise in Mr. Lummond. What he felt was always advertised in his face, his voice, his manner; and at times, when he fancied himself

most cunning, he would catch Rachel's eye and know that she knew the exact and simple truth of the whole matter without being told.

As he was not married to her, he found this quite pleasant and amusing, though of course it would be an unpardonable mistake in a wife.

In order to bring about her scheme of creation, Rachel longed more than anything, ever since Luke decided to read for the bar, that Mr. Haskell should take Lummond into his chambers. She did not dare suggest it to either of them,—not to Mr. Haskell because she felt unequal to explaining why she so much wished it; not to Mr. Lummond because if he disapproved, he might resent her interference on his behalf, and if he approved, he might resent not having thought of it himself. Therefore the wish grew in secret but also in strength.

Her constant visits to Ruth opened out an almost new world to her.

She saw a girl very little older than herself, full of life, full of ambitions, crammed with mercurial energy, doomed to inaction, in almost solitary confinement, which could, humanly speaking, only end in death.

And out of the midst of misery she saw a Tower of Strength arise in the form of this woman's husband. She saw him surround her with such things as money could provide and she saw that the value of them was nothing compared to those

attributes of the soul which no silver and gold can buy.

As time went on, her artistic temperament and creative instincts were enraptured with the vision of a wilderness blossoming as a rose. No miracle but a fact in a plain London street.

This hot admiration for the Haskells left Lummond "rather cold." In his own words, "he could n't see" adequate cause for the enthusiasm they aroused. Of course the man was clever, quite clever, and his wife might be all they said of her, but it was an impossible situation for people of their ages, though of course they were right to make the best of it before the world.

"But can't you see how splendid they both are?" Rachel would say. "Can't you see how an accident of this sort might wreck both their lives, and they simply won't let it do it? He has told her she can probably help him now much more than if she were well and strong and possibly gadding about. It is the only thing in the world she wants to do—not to be a hindrance to him, and to have him say she can be a help has simply lifted her up to Heaven."

Luke screwed his nose round. "I really fail to understand," he said, "how a paralysed woman can help a busy man who spends all day at the law and all night at politics. Still, if you say it can be done, no doubt it is right."

Rachel smiled at him. The end of Luke's

sentences had a knack of correcting the impression they gave at the start.

"Of course it can be done," she said. "We all help or hinder in life. If we don't do one, we must do the other. We can't be neutral. I sometimes wish we could."

Silence on the part of her listener.

"Don't you?"

"I don't follow you. I 've been listening to arguments all day. I 'd much rather you 'd help me have some tea. I see my favourite cake occupying a neutral position quite unnecessarily."

Rachel laughed. It so often happened in their talks that the impersonal and the abstract with her were translated into the personal and concrete by him.

During the following autumn Rachel was called upon to make up her mind on the most momentous question concerning a woman's future.

Luke told her that he loved her,—honestly, truly, devotedly. "Those other affairs" had only been the fluff of life; she was his Hope, his Star, his Anchor.

That any one woman could represent such a funny assortment of things did not strike her as strange; it was a man's way of expressing the height and depth of his feelings.

"I 've always had it in my mind," he said, "ever since we first met. I 've always known you were the one I should want to marry. Rachel, if you say no, it 'll send me straight to the devil."

"If I say yes," Rachel said, "it will be for ever. I shall mean it, Luke. Whatever you do—if you change your mind or anything like that in the future—I sha'n't change! If I once make up my mind to marry you, I shall stick to it."

"I should hope you would," he said. "There are lots of things I want you to teach me—yes, I do. I know I don't fit the part as well as I ought, but nobody else can help me if you don't—and, Rachel darling, I do so want to kiss you. I 've often wanted to; lots of times I 've nearly done it — Yes— just like that— Rachel, you are sweet. I wish I could eat you!"

"I don't believe you 'll really like me to help you, not really. You think you will now but you won't after a bit, and if I love you——"

"You do love me, I know you do. You would n't have let me——"

"Sh!"

"I am not going to hush. You don't know what it 's been like seeing everybody kissing you and you kissing everybody else and I 've been the *only* one sometimes——"

"What *do* you mean?"

"Here! Every day lately somebody has had another person to kiss. There 's been the General and Tom and Bonny and the Bishop—I can't bear you to kiss the Bishop. It 's made me nearly mad. All those men don't care a bit. They just peck at you and you peck at them and I—I 'm

dying of love for you and I might n't come within a yard—Rachel, I must— It 's been so beastly. *Darling, I love you!* Put your arms round me. I never had any mother, Rachel. She died when I was born. I never had anybody. Oh, Rachel!"

Mrs. Robert Haskell was giving a tea-party and Rachel was acting *amie de la maison.*

The hostess was lying on a *Louis-Seize* lounge with cushions of old brocade, or rather she was reclining gracefully, being no longer paralysed above her waist. She had full use of her hands and arms, and the happiness with which she was surrounded was doing more than at one time they even dared to hope for.

Only those who knew her well were invited to her teas, but they were not a few, and there were some wives of great men who almost envied her,—yes, in spite of her being an invalid, she had something in her life that they had somehow missed in theirs and knew it.

When the crowd had gone, Tom arrived to fetch his sister and found Lady Winyon and Lady Frances Frayle making their adieux. They sat down again to enjoy a further conversation and to hear another opinion on "Mr. Haskell's latest."

Tom was told to guess, and he guessed as wide of the mark as one usually does. He ran his eye over Ruth, round the room, up to the ceiling and down to the floor; then he asked whether it were

"domestic, social, legal, or political," and was told domestic.

Thereupon he thought of a yacht for Mrs. Haskell and bowed towards her. It seemed he was wrong, so he suggested a balloon. Wrong again. The gorgeous chair, sofa, or whatever it was she was reclining on? He had never seen that before. No? Then it must be a second aviary!—he had heard a mighty lot of singing and twittering as he neared the house. Not that? Then, was it a diamond tiara, or a sheep dog, or—with sudden inspiration—the carpet?—the carpet looked distinctly new.

He was so ignorant and so anxious for knowledge; would n't they tell him?

They all told him and called him "Goose" at the same time for not guessing.

Tom gasped. The general formation of a male mind renders it very difficult to readapt itself suddenly. He connected Mrs. Haskell always with something stationary and immovable. He failed to place her in rapid motion.

His surprise was as great as Ruth's had been. She had known nothing of the gift in store for her till two days ago, when the door had been flung open and a loud voice announced, "*Mrs. Robert Haskell's motor stops the way!*"

She described how she had waited in a state of amazement, when her husband's face had peered round the screen to "see if she were getting ready!"

Then how he, followed by Sir James Bagot,

followed by her maid with boxes, had come in and dressed her up in the loveliest cloak and hood which those two dear men had ordered on approval in fear and trembling.

Tom listened with his mouth wide open to the beauties of that motor drive, and to the fun that had lurked in such a surprise; then he went down stairs with the ladies to see them to their carriage.

And Ruth turned to Rachel.

"Do you know," she said, "that Sir James believes I may get all right in time. If so, it will be Robert's doing. I told him I almost felt as if I could have jumped up and walked when they came in suddenly like that, and he says it shows some activity, though not enough yet. The power may come back—and then, Rachel, what do you think that sweet old thing said?"

Rachel could n't think.

"'You believe in miracles, Mrs. Haskell,' he said, 'so do I. Keep your ears open and one day you will hear a voice saying, "Rise up and walk," then you will be able to obey.' Sh— here 's your brother."

Tom returned to the drawing-room, his mind full of Lady Winyon. Did n't she look lovely? Was n't she like a piece of Dresden china?

He was not contradicted. She looked just like Dresden china, and where was Sir Victor?

Sir Victor was in Paris, but expected home any day.

Where was Mr. Haskell?

Probably in the House. Had they seen his little interruption the previous evening?

They certainly had and thought it ought to go to *Punch.*

Tom rose and ordered Rachel home, or some one would be worrying the life out of somebody.

Ruth took her hand as she stooped over her. "I hope Mr. Lummond has had another case?"

"Yes, and won it."

Ruth smiled, "that 's good."

"I suppose—" Rachel spoke tentatively, not having had the faintest intention of suddenly revealing her dearest scheme a moment before.

"I suppose Mr. Haskell does n't want anybody else in his chambers, does he?"

Ruth shook her head. "Not that I know of—shall I—?" but Rachel nervously stopped her saying more by kissing her good-bye and retreating to the door.

From little hints like this you will perceive that Luke was possibly justified when he nowadays assured himself that he had never wavered in his choice of a profession.

That bit of soldiering had been part of his education like school and college—but his profession for life? No.

The bar with brains seemed to hold out to him more chance of possessing such things as he loved than any other trade or calling.

Money, first and foremost, the gaining of which would simplify all else, would render his public

position assured, would place him where he could afford to smile at the well-meant advice of some and laugh at the adverse criticism of others.

Money, secondly and in sufficient quantities to make him immune from all the petty worry and vexatious friction possible in private or domestic life.

Money, thirdly and lastly, that he might have a good time, give his friends a good time, and enjoy a long life, never thwarted in his wishes nor baulked of his desires.

Money, finally, to bury him in pomp and state, with the Judge's scarlet robe and ermine left behind, and he himself naked and unashamed at the bar of that Greater Judge "Who knoweth His own handiwork."

No man ever lived a right life who had not been chastened by a woman's love, strengthened by her courage, and guided by her discretion.

Sesame and Lilies.

CHAPTER VIII

RACHEL AND LUKE

IN the little book-room off the library at Flittenbridge Anna was entertaining Beryl Adams, who had walked over to consult him, as she often did, about her brother for whom she kept house. And while together trying to solve the problem of drink, which was ruining an otherwise very fine fellow, Tom came in and switched the conversation on to the latest piece of news in his own family.

"Well, Madam, and what do you think of Rachel's engagement?"

"I congratulate," she said with a little bow.

"Think they 're suited?"

"No."

"Nor I," he laughed, "but they ask no advice, so we give 'em none. Can't think it will last out a long engagement, but we shall see."

"Is it to be a long one?"

"Well, the Governor won't hear of marriage till he 's making five or six hundred a year at the bar."

"Goodness!" the girl said. "When he 's got private means? I always thought you the least mercenary family I had ever met."

"It is n't the money really. It 's to prove the man."

"Oh! Do you think she 'll be able to teach him to brush his hands and wash his hair?"

"Occasionally, I hope."

She laughed. "You know what I mean, Tom."

He nodded. "She is perfectly convinced he is going to be a great man some day, and great men, I understand, are immune from the arbitrary customs of society, that we in our littleness bow to."

The girl laughed and said, turning to her old friend, "I should love to know your opinion, Anna —your real, true, honest opinion on the situation."

Anna shook his head. "I fear it won't work," he said. "She will bless him with all her own possibilities, while he will curse her with all his own limitations."

"That does not look as though you thought him clever."

"Quite clever," Anna nodded, "but his eyesight is n't what it should be, and it will be very difficult to convince him that his vision is at fault and not hers."

Altogether unconscious of these onlookers at the game, Rachel fetched "Lulu" from the station that week-end and drove him to the house in her pony cart.

"We will go round by the village," she said, "it' s very little longer, and they will love to see you."

"Who will?"

"All the people. Your people, Mr. Lummond. I do feel proud of you!"

"You need n't," Luke said, edging rather near her driving elbow. "I 'm an awful crock, you know."

"No, you are n't—excuse flat contradiction. And if you are, you are n't going to be any longer; I won't allow it."

They both laughed with mutual pride in the situation.

"I want to tell you about——"

"Take off your hat quick! No, to the left!"

"Why? I don't see anybody to take it off to."

"Lady Mule. She was standing in a doorway and waved to us. Never mind, we 've passed her now. Were you going to tell me about a case?"

"Yes, a five guinea one—not bad was it?"

"Five guineas! Oh, Lulu, you are getting on! How scrumptious! What was it about?"

"About—Oh, well, it was n't a very nice case. I don't think you 'd like to hear about it, but the solicitor was awfully pleased with the way I did it. He said——"

"Morning, Samuel——"

"He said he hoped to brief——"

"That 's Mrs. Larkin; touch your hat to her."

Rachel nodded and laughed over her shoulder. "She 'll be so excited at having seen us."

"I wish there were n't so many people about," Luke said, "I want——"

"Think of the pleasure you 're giving. They

will go home and smile all the evening just because you 've nodded to them. What did the solicitor say?"

"He began by congratulating me on my ability in——"

"So glad to see you out again, Paul. Rheumatism better?"

"A lot better, my lady. Morning, Sir—Is 't Mr. Lummond?"

Rachel reined in. "Come and speak to him. Did n't you find that stuff very comforting that I sent round?"

"I did. Oh, I did, my lady. It burnt something wonderful, and the wife she could n't think what I was hollerin' for, so she put some on her arm and went to sleep with it lying under her, 'n she woke up screeching worse 'n me, and I had the laff at her then for sure."

"I am so glad," Rachel said. "Splendid you 're being at work again. Good day."

"Good day, my lady." They drove off.

"Why does he call you 'my lady'?"

"Don't know. He always does. The family don't like it—rather jealous I think—no, not really, of course. You must n't take me so literally."

"I wish I could make you 'my lady.' Would n't it be fun?"

"Awful fun! But it would n't make us a bit happier."

"Oh, I don't know. It would mean I had got on rather well and if that firm only brings——"

A dig from the driving elbow made him pause. "What 's the matter now?"

"Sarah Green popped up over the hedge just to look at us. Go on."

"Can't think how you see all these people." Luke's admiration was slightly tempered with annoyance.

Rachel laughed. "Matter of habit, like eating bun with a spoon! You 'll do it automatically after a bit."

"I don't like this public procession. Can't we crawl in some back way? I want to talk to you without interruption."

"So you shall when we get home. I must stop and ask after the baby here. It 's had scarlet fever."

"For goodness' sake don't," Luke said. "You might catch it."

Rachel laughed again. "I 'm not afraid," and she pulled up.

The baby was "doing nicely" according to its mother, and none of the other children had got it. Dr. Tarn now thought it was German measles. "And is that Mr. Lummond, Miss?"

"Yes," Rachel said. "I 'll bring him round some day to have a talk with you. Can't stop now; we shall be late for luncheon. Good-bye."

"Nothing to be afraid of, you see," Rachel said, driving on. "What 's the matter?"

"You scared me out of my life!" Luke really

was a little pale. "Fancy if it had been scarlet fever, you 'd have gone there just the same."

"Just," Rachel said. "You don't catch things unless you 're afraid of them. I should n't have gone in, you know, and you don't die a minute before your time, so what does it matter?"

"I 'm terrified of infection. Don't ever take me near illnesses. I should be sure to catch them."

"My poor dear, what misery for you, but you 'll grow out of it. There 's nothing in the world to be afraid of except doing wrong; you know that really, Luke darling, don't you?"

"I suppose so."

But the knowledge seemed to give the man little satisfaction.

And these were not the only lovers in the world, for Tom, blue-eyed, serious-minded Tom, had fallen in love, against his will, against his inclination, and against all principle.

For years he had indulged in a steady admiration for Beryl Adams, and though he still admired her, yet Miss Winyon, aged three, laid a hold upon his thoughts and affections that put him sometimes in a dilemma between the old love and the new.

Miss Adams roused in him the sense of chivalry that comes out top in any man worthy of the name, when he sees a woman, young and good-looking by the way, battling against fearful odds, subject to discomforts and difficulties through a member of

the stronger sex who should by all the laws of nature protect her from too close contact therewith.

Miss Winyon roused in him a sense of devotion that made him her slave. He submitted to every sort of indignity, and smiled at everything she said and did. If she pulled his hair, he kissed her. If she put her dolls in his arms, he nursed them right way up and hushed them to sleep without laughing. If she climbed on his back and walloped him hard, he was never too tired to gallop his best.

This was real love, though Tom defined it as a flirtation, conducted openly under the eyes of her ladyship, who never failed to give approval when he called for "Mother Mary Monica" in that delightful voice of his.

There was no jealousy between the rivals. They were quite friends, for Miss Adams recognised Miss Winyon's claim to be first under that useful heading in life's inventory, "Second Thoughts are Best."

Rachel was the confidante of all three, and with intuitive perception knew what none of the three told her—that the real power on the throne was neither the one nor the other whose names rose so glibly to the surface of conversation.

Tom's heart had been ploughed all over in its day, but now, common farmer though he was, Rachel knew one bit of ground was set aside for—well—what? Could it be a shrine?

Anyway no hobnailed boots tramped there.

As time went on, Rachel woke from her pleasant dream that life was Beauty, and found it necessary to substitute that other word which rhymes so well and spells in four simple letters what is hard and plain and clear.

Not only for herself did she make this discovery but for all her friends in turn, or rather all her friends in time revealed to her the same waking thought that had lately been her own.

Beryl, for instance, had asked for no better thing than to keep house for her dear and only brother. This thing was given her and for months she was as happy as a queen. She ruled his house, she reigned supreme in his small domain, she scouted the idea of marriage; a brother like her brother was better than a husband like all the other husbands, she knew, and knowing, laughed. She could afford to laugh—Life was Beauty while she slept and dreamed.

Then she came face to face with a hard wall of fact. She was conscious something was wrong and contact with the hard, cold stone woke her to find Duty taking her by the hand.

She was only a girl, and a lucky one in that five and twenty solid years had passed over her dreaming head. Only a girl, so she cried bitterly, as we are all apt to cry when we find our lovely dreams untrue.

The tussle began. Could she go because it was no longer a pleasure to stay? Or must she stay

because it might almost become a duty to stay, and almost a pleasure to go?

As the family name implies, she and her brother were not of mushroom growth. They had that mysterious factor behind them called Race. Therefore Beryl stayed, praying a prayer in common with others of her sex.

"Let me not see with my eyes nor hear with my ears, let me not know outwardly that there is anything to be known."

And then later, when no efforts were made to disguise the ugly truth from her, when rumours came up from the village, when General Cremayne brought Captain Adams back one day and himself put him to bed, refusing his sister admittance or even information beyond "a possible touch of sun and best left alone"—then after that, when she threw her arms round her brother's neck and said passionately, "Don't let me see you like that, darling? Don't let me ever see you anything but what you should be? Don't let me, boy, will you?"

And the Captain swore like a gentleman he would never do so again, and if he did, she was to leave him for ever. That, he said, would be the worst that could befall.

Therefore, when it did occur, Beryl said no word, neither did she leave, but fostered the idea of "peccadilloes" being part of a strong man's nature, and made every excuse for him, though in the abstract the thing was not to be named save as a disgrace and a reproach.

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The country-side knew of this "little weakness." It was accustomed to Captain Adams being "a little the worse" and it was amused at the frequently peculiar situations in which, owing to it, he found himself. Neither Rachel nor Mary Winyon nor Ruth Haskell had ever heard a word from the man's sister which could demand sympathy in her lot, and yet they were all her friends in a greater degree than most.

That Tom knew, Rachel suspected, that Anna knew she was sure, that her father knew she had proof, and she pondered on Beryl's reticence with her own sex as a matter of silent interest and questionable virtue.

The General would help with advice and sympathy; Tom would help with his strong right arm; Anna would help—how would Anna help? She wished she knew how he would deal with a case like that.

No, she was n't curious; she only wanted to know.

Pity our eagerness to know
From whence we come and whither we go.
How stole into the world, and why,
Sin and her daughter Misery.
Teach us to whom among the blest
Prayer must be offered and sin confessed
That the heavy-laden and sore-distressed
May to their weary souls find rest.

Euripides.

CHAPTER IX

HUSBAND AND WIFE

ROBERT HASKELL had so far fulfilled his wife's prophecy of him as to be M.P., though not K.C., by the time he was thirty-six. In the minds of others he was a brilliant success at the bar as a junior, but in his own mind and Ruth's mind, which was the same thing, he expected to be a greater success as a leader. Already he was in such request socially, legally, and politically that Ruth smilingly said at times she might as well be a widow for all she saw of her "Old Legality."

Yet it was not altogether easy for the man to climb the ladder of fame and maintain a balance all the way. There were days and nights when Robert would come home tired in body and mind to find it had been a bad day with Ruth—a day when the spirit had tried to rise above the flesh, and the flesh by its dragging weight had won. Nights when he was kept late, and she could not sleep, when the nerves of both were over-strained, and he would sit holding her hand and quieting

her fears regardless of his own cares and worries, because it was always so much worse for her.

Then came the remorse and repentance, when she saw the marks on the man's face next day, when she blamed herself for a selfish and inconsiderate woman, when she told him she ought to die and let him be free, that she was only hampering his career and hindering his success.

This phase had to be dealt with as gently as the others, and often he would leave the house worn out with the effort of keeping a sane and normal view, when life presented him with puzzles to solve where neither his knowledge of law nor politics could be of any avail.

Then there were other times, when Ruth stood between him and despair and depression and the devil, when Ruth held his hand and said things that brought back the smile to his lips and the light to his eyes, when each whispered to the other, "But for you, what should I be?" Yet the world knew nothing of this. The world judged by what it heard and saw, and it saw what the Haskells meant it to see. A jolly-successful man, who carried all before him, and a really wonderful woman—considering.

Rachel knew. Partly because she was animated by the same desire to be to Luke the best that a woman can be to a man, and therefore she often came to Ruth for hints and helps, to think and to thank in that wonderful complex dealing with

souls when they try to be one and yet persist in remaining two.

Ruth did not always disguise from Rachel the anguish of heart she suffered on Robert's account. It was bad enough for her to have to lie still when she longed to be up and doing, but it was a hundred thousand times worse for her dearly beloved to have such sadness in his life, and then, the dread thought would leak out. "How long will it last? How long does a man's patience hold out?"

Rachel thought it depended on the man, and remarked sententiously that "you can't compare a common man's mind with the very uncommon mind of a man like Mr. Haskell."

Ruth thought this decidedly good and saved it up to tell Robert on his return.

She smiled at Rachel, saying it did her good to talk like that. The keeping everything bottled up inside was at times an awful strain, and if Rachel did not mind, it was much better to "let fly" to her than to—well really, with a laugh, than to any one else. Rachel said she liked Ruth to talk in any way that suited her, and Ruth complied with a vivid description of what their life had been before the accident. "Three years of bliss," she said, "that was what we thought it was going to be always. That was what we planned. An ideal home. An ideal marriage, Rachel, just what you are planning now. And look at the real. Look at me—a millstone hung round his neck for ever. He can never be free of me!"

"Do you think he has ever wished to be?"

"Never! But it does n't alter the fact. Do you think I don't know there are hundreds of women prettier, cleverer, nicer in every way than I am—better suited to be the wife of a rising man, if only because they have the full use of their limbs? Do you think that lying here day after day, I ever forget Robert meets them, talks with them, admires them, contrasts them—with his own poor wreck at home, and would n't he be more than human if he did not feel at times what a pleasant change it would be to have a healthy wife instead of a sickly one?"

"I think he is more than human."

"You don't think he has ever thought that?"

"I don't think he has ever compared you with any other woman, and found you wanting."

"Rachel!"

"Perfect fact. I 'm not saying it to flatter you or make you comfortable. Your Robert would rather have you as you are: keen, sympathetic, alive, reasonable, pretty—why not mention it?—fascinating in your *spirituelle* fashion than he would have any other woman who combined with all this lengthy list of charms, a capacity for physical achievements indoors and out for the very simple reason that he loves you with all his heart and soul. And you are a wicked woman—a very wicked woman if you need any one to tell you so! There!"

The door opened suddenly, and Ruth gave vent

to the obvious, "Talk of an angel, you hear his wings!"

Robert came in, kissed his wife, and shook hands with Rachel. He looked beaming.

"Just out of Court," he said cheerily, "and supposed to be in the 'House,' but I knew five minutes here would make me of more use to the Empire so—may I ring for tea, Ruth?"

"Ring, telephone, stamp on the floor. Rachel, don't go."

Rachel demurred. Robert raised his eyebrows at Ruth and made other exaggerated signs about a third party. When the pantomime was over, he politely begged Miss Cremayne to stay.

Tea arrived and Ruth poured it out. Rachel offered to but her offer was rejected. The master of the house said if there was any wrangling he should go to the A. B. C. shop at the corner.

His wife eyed him smilingly over the tea-tray and said, "How 's the big case gone to-day?"

"It 's over."

"Who won? Did you?"

"Yes."

"Robert! There 's something more. What is it?"

"Fisher never turned up."

"What!"

"He was run into by a bus on his way to the Courts."

"Not killed?"

"No, no, but he was dazed and had to be taken

home. I called in just now to enquire and was able to see him. He 's all right, I 'm glad to say."

Ruth nodded. "Nice of you. But what happened, what did you do?"

"We started work and could n't think why Fisher did n't come. Fifth day of the case and most important. Then his clerk brought the news of the accident and—well—I knew I 'd got my chance. We had one very amusing witness before lunch and afterwards I spoke for about forty minutes. Then the Judge summed up dead in our favour."

"Did he say anything about you?"

Robert smiled. "I think you 'd have been pleased."

"Did he compliment you, from the bench, in open Court?"

"Yes, all that."

"Word for word, please. I want word for word."

"He was very nice—could n't have been nicer. You 'll see all about it in the evening papers. Now I must go."

Ruth nodded to Rachel. "You 'll have to stay and paste into the book while I cut out."

Rachel walked to the window and stood looking into space. She heard Robert step to the sofa and pause there. She knew why he paused, and after the pause came Ruth's voice full of pride and other things.

"Good-bye, my darling Old Legality."

"Twelve minutes—twelve little, tiny minutes, and you look a different woman! Now fancy if you were an unattractive widow or a faded spin. Are n't you ashamed of yourself for not being thankful every second you live?"

"Do you know what this means—for him?"

"Of course! I repeat, are n't you ashamed of yourself?"

Rachel spoke in jerks. The eyes that were bright and dry saw there were tears in the eyes that belonged to and partially accounted for the jerky voice.

"I 'm really one Psalm of gratitude, dear, but I chant sometimes in a minor key for the pleasure of hearing you say I 'm wrong."

Where there 's Love and Truth there 's Heaven.
—Coventry Patmore.

CHAPTER X

BEFORE THE PARTY

THE fiat had gone forth.

The Winyons were to be political.

They had not decided this for themselves; it had been decided for them. They had all the qualifications necessary for the part,—a young couple, good-looking, with property in the country and excellent shooting, a town house large enough for purposes of entertainment, no lack of money, intelligence between them not below the average, and a lot of spare time on hand.

Sir Victor agreed, and in due course, when a vacancy occurred, was returned unopposed for the northern division of one of the home counties.

In his capacity of M. P. he dined all the bigwigs, and his wife held receptions later, at which tiaras and blue ribbons vied with each other in friendly competition.

One night in special was to be a grand affair. It was rumoured that some great people were going to honour Lady Winyon after the opera. The cup of Rachel's enjoyment was brimming in the afternoon, for Mr. Haskell, whose name was now

on every lip, had looked in at tea-time and had told her he should like to see Lummond—nothing of consequence but if he was at the Winyons', he was to make a point of speaking to him.

Rachel's eyes sparkled. Was it her dearest scheme? Had Ruth hinted? Did Mr. Haskell think well of Luke? If only he would appear now——

She heard a roar of laughter from the other drawing-room and saw him. Mr. Lummond was surrounded with the fair sex, two were talking to him and three were hanging on his words. They were all five sitting at a small table playing at having tea.

Did she dare push the position? She was keenly anxious, and it was a rare thing to find two such busy men—she loved to bracket Luke with Robert Haskell in anyway—that they were both men was something; that they were both legal was considerable—such a rare thing to find the two disengaged at tea-time.

"He is here," she said hesitatingly, "but perhaps you would rather not, now. I will tell him—this evening."

"Oh, no time like the present," Robert said pleasantly, and stood aside for her to pass through the archway.

She walked towards the cheerful young group unobserved. They were so intent on something Luke was saying that not to interrupt too abruptly, she paused behind his chair.

"Light of Sharon!"

"Rose of the harem—How does that sound?"

"Splendid! But go on; what am I to be?"

"You? Oh, 'Heart's Delight' would be pretty and suitable, I think—any more?" and he swallowed some tea.

"Won't you have me, Mr. Lummond? I 'm very hurt!"

Luke bowed—"Lady of our Love, I am greatly honoured—" Then they saw Rachel and made room.

"Come and sit down. Mr. Lummond is choosing a harem. We are all going to be in it. You are, of course, to be number one wife. He 's very Oriental, my dear; you 'll have a lot of trouble with him."

Rachel laughed, but looked at Mr. Haskell. There was nothing in it—only fun of course—but why, why, was it just then when something so important was in the air?

Robert brought up another chair and placed it between the "Rose" and the "Light."

"May I?" he said deferentially, "dare I intrude without endangering my life? Very pretty, Lummond, but not the least original. I 've used them all myself."

"You, Mr. Haskell?"

"Even I. Ask my wife." They all laughed and they all talked, but the big legal man said nothing to the other legal man that was of more importance than that, and when he got up to take

his leave, he only nodded and said, "See you to-night?"

Lummond said "Where?" vaguely and without rising, and Rachel murmured, "The Winyons'," but failed to catch his eye to tell him things.

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "I hate parties, you know." But Mr. Haskell had gone. "You aren't going to take me out?" He turned his head on one side, the picture of dejection. "Rachel, you 're not going to take me out to-night?"

She was sipping iced coffee and did not answer. The "Lady of our Love" said: "Of course you 're going to be taken out like a good boy and given a treat, so don't look like that. When number one wife is doing her best to help you along in life, you ought to be slapped for looking like that!"

"I shall change your name—Female! Virago! Cat!"

But the harem broke up laughing, the lady Mothers were departing, and Luke left with his "Heart's Delight" to return later for dinner.

He slipped away from the dining-room and joined Rachel as the ladies went upstairs, "Let me smoke in your little room, may I?"

They turned off half-way and sat in the window. He did not smoke immediately. He gave her a five-guinea hug—yes—in spite of her fine gown and her demi-semi quavers lest some one should come in. And he told her he adored her, and would do anything in the world for her. She was looking sweet, sweet, SWEET!

And Rachel told him of a feeling that something was going to happen—something good, something she was sure was in the air—did not he feel it? No? How odd, for she believed it had to do with him! It must have, or else it could not effect her. What did he think it could be?

Mr. Lummond had no idea. Her hair was very pretty to-night. What was it called, when done like that? *Ondulé.* Well it was very well *onduléd.* He could put a whole finger into the wave. He could now. Keep still and he 'd see——

Time flew and Rachel spoke of getting her gloves.

"What for?"

"The Winyons'!"

"You 're not going? Not really going off to a rotten party? Oh, Rachel, don't go!"

Rachel said she must go; she had promised Mary she would. Besides her mother expected her company. But he need n't cry. She had got an invitation for him too. She wanted him most particularly to be his very best to-night. There was something in the air and he might find out what it was.

Then Luke employed cunning. He had a bit of a headache. He really did not feel up to it. He only wanted to sit with her in a half light and talk—like this.

Rachel said she had sat with him for nearly two hours and now they must both go and do their duty.

Luke hated "duty," and said so. He would n't —he was blowed if he would—go to any beastly party, and Rachel might give it up just for once when he was n't feeling well.

Then Rachel "kissed him and coaxed him and called him a dear" but all to no purpose. He would not go to the party, no, not to meet Royalty, no, nor Robert Haskell, no, not for anybody.

"To please me, Luke, just because I ask it—I don't ask it without a reason."

"What 's the reason?"

"I can't tell you because I don't know for certain, but I think it 's some scheme of the Haskells for you—any way you will know when you get there. It 's not an idle request to-night. I really want you to come with us."

"Thank you, much obliged," Luke said. "I want no schemes to get me on in life. I am quite capable of——" Then Mrs. Cremayne appeared pulling on her gloves.

"Come, children, it 's past eleven and your father will be expecting us."

"Won't you let us off," Luke said, still keeping his chair. "We don't want to go."

"I 'm afraid you will have to," said the lady, "or Rachel must. You, of course, can do as you like."

"Can't she stay with me?" audaciously.

"No, not after we have all gone out. Now come and escort us like a good boy."

Rachel fetched her gloves and appeared cloaked

and ready. She smiled at Luke but got no answering smile. Her mother's "Come like a good boy," spoken so naturally as to her own sons had decided him to take a stand. He was not going to be ordered about. He was not going to be henpecked. He would show that when he said a thing, he meant it.

They all moved downstairs. He let Mrs. Cremayne pass him and get unaided into the carriage, but he touched Rachel's arm as though to help her.

"Good night. I hope you 'll enjoy yourselves." He signed to the groom to shut the door.

"Luke! Are n't you really coming? I—I want you partic——"

He laughed, waved his hand, and walked off.

Rachel had much ado not to sob. She leaned back in the carriage, her heart in her shoes, her mind in a turmoil.

Her mother kept her lips pressed tight together lest something should escape. She thought such conduct odious and extremely rude, neither like a lover nor a gentleman. Yet in her heart, dear lady, she knew it was thoroughly mannish.

You'd die before you hurt me
Intentionally? True.
But it is not, O dearest,
The thing you mean to do.

It's what you do unthinking
That makes the quick tear start;
The tear may be forgotten
But the hurt stays in the heart.

CHAPTER XI

AT THE WINYONS'

THE Winyon party was a success. The Great People came on from the opera and everything went without a hitch.

Robert Haskell, the man of the hour, was among those bidden to sup at the high table, and Rachel was amongst the common herd who admired the procession from a distance.

She had apologised to Mary for Luke's absence, and Lady Winyon had smiled and let her pass on in the crush. It made no difference to the party; Luke was "out of it"; he chose to be a loser where he might have been a gainer—that was all.

Rachel's heart was very sore. The bitterness of disappointment was dangerously near sounding in her voice. It was as though a blight had fallen on a fair and lovely garden and shrivelled everything that should have been expanding in the sun.

Towards one o'clock the crowd began to lessen, and she wished it were possible to go home. Sir Victor, passing through the throng, stooped and whispered, "Some one's looking for you."

She felt something bubble right up through her and burst sparkling from her eyes.

Luke had changed his mind and had come. He was sorry to have hurt her and been such a pig, and he had come to make it right.

This thought sprang into being before Sir Victor took her by the arm and guided her towards the farther door.

She went, automatically, looking for Lummond's dark head and wondering why he could n't seek her out himself.

"Well, Miss Cremayne, and how goes the world with you?"

No need to look for Lummond any more. Mr. Haskell nodded "Thanks, Winyon," and drew her away to a bench in the window.

Rachel's soul gasped, if the soul pure and simple can gasp. Was she going to be honoured by one of the temporary Great Ones of the earth and if so WHAT would people say?

Mr. Haskell was perfectly charming, said he was sorry Luke was n't there, but, with delightful tact, refrained from asking the reason why. Then he spoke of being able to do with another man in his Chambers; did she think Lummond was satisfied where he was; or would he care to make a change, and perhaps do a bit of "devilling" for him? Only half of Rachel's mind was fixed on the conversation; the other half was running round the room in company with those who were eying her in somewhat astonished fashion.

"I 'm sure he 'd like it," she began—then broke off with, "the French Ambassadress," softly, "is trying to catch your eye."

The hint was heard and wilfully ignored. Robert went on talking of Luke.

"Will you tell him this is what I wanted to see him about? Ask him to come round at four o'clock to-morrow."

"I do think it good of you." Suppressed excitement sounded in the commonplace words.

"Not at all. Great thing for me to get him. I believe he is going to do well."

"Oh, Mr. Haskell! Do you?"

"With you to help him, he must."

"He—I—" Thoughts and ideas contradicting each other crowded too thickly for coherence, so she said below her breath with that half-eye on the audience, "Baron von——"

"I know, but I 've been so good all the evening."

"They are saying, 'That chit!'"

"One must enjoy oneself sometimes."

Was there a wink or only a twinkle? When she got home, it had become "a twinkling wink," that one would n't see, unless one were meant to see!

There was no night that night, only early dawn and sunrise.

Rachel received a letter in the morning from her lover—full of contrition, full of anxiety as to the effect of his bad conduct on her. If she felt she

could forgive him, would she ring him up on the telephone and say something—it did not matter what? He would know by the sound of her voice —he was so susceptible—he would know by the tone whether she forgave him, etc. There was a great deal more.

Rachel breakfasted and then rang him up. He heard her say cheerily.

"Is that you? My dear, last night was perfect! —No, it did n't matter a bit your not being there. I 've got a message for you— Yes, it was about you. I thought it was—that was why— Mr. Haskell wants to see you, four o'clock to-day— At his Chambers, yes. You can come and see me after— Oh, no, that is n't long at all. I shall be so interested to hear what you decide. It was the most beautiful party I 've ever been at— Not a bit tired, thanks; never felt better— Good-bye!"

The sun never ceased to shine for one little minute. It was an absolutely glorious day.

Rachel went round to see Lady Winyon to congratulate her on her success and was kept to lunch to talk it over.

Sir Victor chaffed her about Robert Haskell, and Mary threatened to tell Ruth.

By the time they had finished discussing, it was nearly four o'clock, and Rachel with her spirit at the Temple took her body in a cab down to Westminster and got this for her greeting.

"Well, nice things I 've heard about you!"

"Already? Why, I 've come to tell you myself!"

"Already indeed! It 's all over the place! 'Who was the distinguished lady last night,' etc. A fine time I 've had of it to-day!"

Rachel laughed. "None of your flattering. It 's entirely owing to Mr. Haskell. He condescended, yes, I said condescended, to speak to me for five minutes at the end of the evening and because he was tired of standing in glorious company, he sat with humble me in a window, in order to tell me something about Luke."

"Oh, yes!"

"I suppose you don't the least know what it was?"

"Not the least."

"You outrageous l—! Ruth, how can I thank you enough? I know it 's your doing."

Ruth shook her head smiling. "Tell me," she said, "just what happened in your own most graphic style."

Rachel complied—with additions, and her hostess felt she had been at the party. "Was n't it delightful Robert being sent for and honoured in that way? No, it really was n't so very good of him to think of Luke—he 'd got room for another man—he really wanted somebody he could rely on."

"Well, of course," the guest said, "I feel it 's a most splendid chance. If I were a man, which thank the gods I 'm not, I 'd rather be Mr. Haskell's devil than any body else's angel!"

Then they talked quietly of the possibility of

marriage in the near future, and Rachel said, "This is more likely to help us forward than anything, and if we do get married, it will be Mr. Haskell's doing."

"Another," Ruth laughed. "If you knew how often I hear that remark! If I ever succeed in life, if I ever get out of this difficulty, if I ever get straight again, if I 'm able to make a fresh start, if in short, we are ever the men and women we ought to be—it will be Mr. Haskell's doing!"

"You are a lucky woman."

"I am, my dear."

A footman came in with a message. Mr. Lummond had called for Miss Cremayne, but would not come upstairs.

Miss Cremayne went down and it was Luke who smiled anxiously as they met on the doorstep.

It was all settled. He had agreed to go into Haskell's Chambers. Yes, no doubt it might be a good thing—both ways. No, he could n't exactly say he was grateful. It was hardly a case for gratitude. It was quite a mutual arrangement. By the time they reached home his apathy on the subject had somewhat damped her enthusiasm. For she must remember there were two ways of looking at it. He liked doing things on his own—he was made like that. He wanted to make his own name, not to be known only as Robert Haskell's devil, though that might do as a stepping-stone. Anyway, he had done it to please her.

Upstairs again in her little room Rachel was

required to kiss him many times, to assure him she did not mind about last night. He had n't been able to sleep he was so afraid she was angry. Had n't she been angry?

Rachel was thereupon forced to remember what she had forgotten. She had been angry, but it was because he had seemed unkind in refusing to do something to please her. But if he had a headache——

Luke, with that longing to purge his soul thoroughly, refused this excuse for his conduct. He had been a brute. He was really sorry, he had been "put out" at the idea of her "scheming" for him. That was what upset him if she really wished to know. She had used the wrong word. However, now he had promised to move into Haskell's Chambers, on purpose to please her—would she, could she?

And Rachel, with that dreadful feeling that she had been flying round in a circle, said, no doubt it was her fault and "least said soonest mended," and began telling him in rather a tired voice about the party—then was surprised to find how little there was to tell!

Petit à petit, l'oiseau fait son nid.
French Proverb.

CHAPTER XII

AND AFTER

THERE was no doubt about it, the studio—workshop—play room was the coolest place in summer, and quite the warmest place in winter. Also no matter which of his various trades he happened to be following at the moment, Anna was first and foremost the most delightful host anywhere.

The secret of his special charm in this line lay no doubt in the fact that he allowed all his guests to feel at home. This does not imply he "made them at home," quite a different thing, involving some sense of volition on the part of host. No, he adopted rather the passive attitude and permitted his guests to indulge in the positive one, which so enhanced their own enjoyment.

In the midst of drawing a design for Atalanta he felt called to model in clay, and as he regarded all such impulse as movements of the Divine in man, the disobeying of which would be sin, he dropped the sketching board and pulled away the

wet rags covering a grey lump that was as yet without form.

A very short time produced the idea of a charming little figure speeding in full flight. The action of the legs and feet was perfect. There was a verve and grace in the outline pleasing to the critical eye of the creator, which the poise of the head did not entirely satisfy.

A rap-tap on the door was followed by the appearance of Rachel. She came in silently and stood at the point of vantage, making a telescope of her hands.

Anna went on with his work.

"You want more strain in the throat."

He turned to see her posed. Head not so forward as upward, the chin tilted, lessening his line of curve to the neck.

He gazed with artist admiration for the spirit that possessed her.

"You 're quite right. Can you stand a minute?"

He remodelled the head from the shoulders, but was not content.

"Could you run?" he said.

"Yes," she answered, and cleared a space down the length of the room.

"Run," he said. "Run like the devil!"

"Much better, let me run as I should if the devil were after me," she said, panting in a chair.

"I 've got it! You 're Inspiration personified."

"Have I helped you, Anna?"

A nod.

"Then I 've not lived in vain! I can't stay now. I 've got an assignation to keep, but will you come and have tea with Luke and me at five o'clock?"

She blew him a kiss and was gone.

"Rachel dear."

"Yes."

"Dearest!"

"Well?"

"Darling!"

"What do you want?"

"You."

"Well, here I am."

"Yes, but it 's all so unsatisfactory."

Rachel opened her eyes wide. "Unsatisfactory? What do you mean?"

"I mean going on like this. Why can't we get married?"

"So we can as soon as you are making an income at the bar—but I think this is a lovely time, Luke. It will never be as nice again."

"Very nice," he said, "but I 'd like you in a house of my own."

"This is your own house!"

"Well, without all the other people."

"You can turn us out whenever you like if you want to."

"Don't be so aggravating, Rachel. There! that 's what I hate. Whenever I want to kiss you, I 'm pushed off, because somebody 's looking."

"Well, you don't suppose when we 're married that you are going to kiss me just whenever the fancy takes you, do you, Sir?"

"I shall have a right to, and you 'll have to obey me!"

Rachel gasped. This was indeed audacity. "Lu—lu! Favours and privileges mean prettier things than rights."

"I prefer the latter," he said, "and I shall have them."

"And I prefer the former and shall give them, when you learn not to snatch."

"I could n't help it! You look so awfully sweet when you ride your high horse. Do you think, darling sweetheart, you could find another peach?"

They were both under a tree in the garden—a place where the children had always played house. Rachel was leaning against the trunk working, and Luke was lying on his face beside her, lifting it from time to time to "worry her." She put her hand into a basket and produced a golden plum.

"Very nice," he said, looking at it through his fingers, "but not what I want."

"When you can't have what you want, it would be polite to say 'Thank you' for what you can get. It 's a lovely plum."

Luke drew himself nearer to her. "Put that beastly work away. Oh, do, darling, and let me put my head on your lap. Rachel, if you loved me, you 'd let me."

"We are n't 'Arry and 'Arriet," she said, revolt-

ing inwardly against conduct that offended her outward sense of taste. "You are quite near enough, and I love you just as much there—in fact more—yes, I do."

"I don't believe you do," said the man crossly. "I love you ever so much more than you love me!"

"Do you, dear? I hope not, for that would n't be fair. I don't think so. If I did not love you better than anybody else in the world, I would n't marry you," and she stooped just kissing his hair.

"Oh, Rachel, when you talk like that, I feel lovely! I 'd do any mortal thing for you. Let me have your hand! I declare if you won't, I 'll pull off your shoe and kiss your foot!"

The colour flew into the girl's face. "You dare!" she said; "you dare to touch me without my leave."

Luke dropped his head on to his folded arms and lay motionless. Her colour faded to its usual tint, and the silence was broken only by the song of a thrush in a neighbouring tree.

She worked on without a word.

He seemed to have gone asleep.

And a cloud came over the sun.

Presently Rachel took up a book, turning the pages till she found what she sought. Then she read, and looked at her lover, and read, and looked again.

"Lulu," softly.

Only the bird answered.

She read down another page.

Then she put away her work and said still softly,

"Lulu!"

He felt her hand touch his hair, then it slipped with difficulty under his arm, and with still more difficulty got hold of his hand and pulled it towards her.

"Come up here. I want you to sit by me and look at this. Won't you come?"

No answer. But she held tight on to the hand that pulled away from her.

She turned to her book and began to read aloud what she had been reading to herself.

"I 've wanted to read you that bit ever so many times, Lulu. I want to know if you like it, and agree with it. It 's my idea, or one of my ideas, for our future."

Silence.

"Don't you think it 's rather a pity to spoil our afternoon like this? I 've got such a lot I want to talk to you about, and the others will be back soon. Won't you come up here?" Getting no reply, she began reading again, when the book was suddenly dashed from her knee and hurled down the bank.

"Oh, Luke—and it 's Ruskin!"

"Don't care. I hate Ruskin! Now I suppose you hate me?— Do you hate me?— Do you?"

He peered up cautiously to see how she was taking it, but she was n't there.

It was beastly!

Rachel walked slowly to the greenhouses, and there selected two of the largest and ripest peaches she or the gardener could find. As she returned she saw Luke in the distance picking up Ruskin. He was penitent, so that was all right, and she would give him a little "coal of fire on his head."

"Catch!"

He hesitated momentarily. Pride bade him not attend. Then he saw what it was and jumped forward in time to save its preciousness from bulging on the gravel.

"Oh, Rachel! You are a brick!" and his eyes shone.

The fruit disappeared in a luscious silence, and they wiped their fingers on the grass.

The woman's power is for rule—not for battle . . . and her intellect is . . . for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision. Her great function is Praise.—*Ruskin.*

CHAPTER XIII

THE NEW K. C.

WHEN Robert Haskell "took silk," Ruth understood the crisis of his life had arrived.

He drew a picture for her of a new K. C. sitting biting his nails at a briefless table and waiting in all the glory of an empty title for the means to justify such a step up the risky ladder of fame.

Ruth smiled and felt no fear. Rachel also smiled as Luke graphically described the letting loose of a lot of work which might come his way and enable them in perhaps quite a short time to announce their coming marriage.

Robert's anxiety, real or feigned, was short-lived. The work came in just as fast as before. He was in more request than ever.

Ruth kept their engagement book and noted sadly how less and less came the chance of an empty space that could be filled in with the word "Home." The women who came to tea with her seemed to see him so infinitely oftener than she saw him, and the stories of his popularity grew as stories of that sort are wont to grow in the minds belonging to bodies never there.

"Safety in numbers, darling," Robert used to say, "and if that is really the fifth note I 've had from her Ladyship about nothing at all, will you be good enough to answer it for me, and say all the pretty things that come so naturally to you."

"Shall I say you 'll go?"

"Go! For mercy's sake, no! Keep me free of all engagements for the next two weeks if you can. I 'll drop a hint in the right quarter that I 've made you my private secretary. How much do you want, Madam, for the job?"

"One half-hour of your company daily!"

"Half an hour—it 's sweating! I 'll make it an hour. By George! if I only could! One whole hour every day with the woman I love best! Will you really undertake my letters, Ruth?"

"You know I will. I shall love to do it, and feel I 'm of use to you."

"Use?" he said. "A housemaid can be useful, but I know no lady of any house so ornamental as my lady. I could n't live with an ugly woman, you know. I really could n't!"

"Robert!"

"No, dear, one knows one's weaknesses, and that is mine. There—all that batch to be refused as gracefully as you like, but firmly. What a joke to have a private secretary. You 'll be learning typewriting next."

"And you will just sign your name!"

"Yes. That ought to impress on the *beau monde* that husband and wife are one!"

Ruth laughed. "You 've found out the necessity——"

Robert took out his watch, and began in a throaty voice:

"The world is very evil, dear— By Jove! The times are waxing late."

He kissed her. "Good-bye, temptress. Wish I had n't got to go out to-night. Be good till I come back."

This was how Ruth came to pass some days not only without any conscious sadness in her life, but with a sort of light-hearted gaiety almost reminiscent of the honeymoon. There was not anybody in the world like her Robert—no man so busy and popular in public, so more than delightful in private; no man making Heaven out of the common materials so easily used in making Hell. Ruth wrote the letters, and mused, and read the papers, and was eating her lunch when the telephone bell rang.

A private line had been connected, so that Robert could talk with her, and he now asked if she would be good enough to call for him in the motor at four o'clock and take him to the "House."

She saw him again when he came in to dress, and he told her he should not be late—back by twelve, or anyway twelve fifteen; he 'd look in to see if she were asleep.

The night was horribly foggy,—bad enough getting to the dinner, worse still going on to the

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theatre with the party, and when they came out, it was to find the atmosphere of the usual pea soup consistency. The ladies were all nervous, and must be seen home by male escort. Robert offered his services to his hostess for any distressed damsel under her care. They were accepted by a certain lady we will call "Mrs. Helen of Troy" and her niece.

The reason for calling her so is that Robert long ago gave her that name when describing her mode of action to Ruth after first making her acquaintance in a country house. This "Mrs. Helen of Troy" now begged that a four-wheeler might be brought, in which she and Mr. Haskell together could take her niece home before arriving at her own little house in Buckingham Gate.

The four-wheeler was procured, and the beautiful "Helen," shimmering in sequins and shivering with fright, clung to the niece's arm during the slow but perilous journey to the address that really came first. After that she clung to Robert, not violently or unpleasantly at all, but with feminine gentleness, combined apparently with a childish love of contact with a strong grown-up when in danger or in the dark. She apologised now and again for being so silly and relinquished her hold just long enough to make the ordinary man regret that she had n't been silly a little longer; then, when the flare of a torch threw light on some cab-runner's face, there would come that eloquent, if silent, appeal for the protecting arm of

the law that Robert was too courteous to refuse.

At her door he attempted to ring the bell, but "Helen of Troy" said she had a latch-key and gave it him with grace. He turned it in the lock, pushed open the door, and stepped to one side saying, "That 's all right. Now you are safe, I 'll—" But the lady was very far from all right. She had trod on her gown, had slipped on the step, and had very seriously hurt her foot—so seriously she could not walk. She tried bravely to make the best of it, and begged Mr. Haskell to go home. The cabman could help her quite well.

Robert suggested he was as good as a cabman any day; besides he would rather help her into the house than hold the horse outside in the fog. If she took his arm, could n't she? She thought she could, but it made her wince with pain, and her glorious eyes darkened with brave endurance.

Robert half carried her into the first room he saw and offered to ring for her maid.

"No use," "Helen" said. "They 're all gone to bed. I never let them sit up. Nothing has ever happened before."

"But I can't leave you like this," the man said politely, "let me run upstairs and call. Some one will wake."

"Only the boy," "Helen" murmured, "and be frightened. The fog is all coming into the house. Have you left the door open? Oh, would you mind?"

Robert did mind and felt like bolting into the

cab and driving away with the door closed behind him, but it would be rather brutal under the circumstances.

When he returned to the room, he saw it was the dining-room and the cloth was still on the table. "Helen" from the sofa switched on more electric light and he noticed a supper was laid —for one. Robert braced himself for some pleasing eventualities, and under his breath he prayed, "Oh, Ruth, take care of me!"

"Helen" lay back with her eyes half-closed, one alabaster arm flung round her head. Robert poured some brandy into a glass and she sipped it neat. She made a slight facial contortion of attractive design, and pushed away the glass when he offered her more.

The foot was twitching with pain. Robert suggested she should rub it, and "Helen" thought him a fool.

Then suddenly she sat up. "It 's better!" Intense relief in her voice. "Really better. Oh, what a good thing!" She sighed, looked at the table and then at Robert. "I believe I could manage a sandwich," she remarked. "Could you?"

Robert quite thought he could, and he helped her limp to a chair where the table was laid for one.

"I wonder," the lady said thoughtfully, "if we could find you a plate or a glass in the cupboard. Why there are some on the sideboard, and forks. What a piece of luck!"

"Luck indeed!" Mr. Haskell beamed with pleasure, and opened some champagne which happened to be about.

"Did you pay the cab?"

"No."

"Then he 's waiting all this time, poor man!"

"Let him wait," said Robert recklessly.

The supper was a very dainty affair when come to be closely examined, and "Helen's" eyes flashed dangerously, the diamonds sparkled, and the sequins shimmered. Robert's eyes had a wicked, wicked twinkle at the corners.

Suddenly "Helen" was moved. She heard a cry—it was her baby. With no thought of self she fled from the room.

"Up two good flights at least," Mr. Haskell surmised in his moment of solitude.

She came down, drooping a little with the weight of the child in her arms. She took her old seat, facing him, and with the little fair head pillowed against her shoulder, and tucking the blanket round the small form, she looked most motherly and sweet.

Robert felt silent admiration spoke better than applause. He twisted the stem of his wine-glass looking at her.

She laid her dark head softly against the fair one, looking at him.

"He 's gone off again," she said quietly.

"How quick you were to hear!"

"Mothers' ears are always open."

"Ah."

"I 'm so sorry. Sh—darling, it 's all right; Mammy 's got you." The baby had n't moved that Robert could see, but mothers' eyes, of course. "So sorry for people who have n't children."

"Yes, indeed."

"Fancy what I should do, with my husband abroad, if I had not this little scrap? I often wonder."

Robert shook his head gaily fancying, but not the least wondering.

"You have n't any? Ah, forgive me—I was n't sure. How too sad!"

Robert's three-fold nod was presumably heavy with hidden grief.

A sympathetic silence reigned for more than a minute. When Robert looked up, "Helen" was softly kissing the baby's head. "Too sad," she whispered, "you poor man, I 'm so sorry."

"One tries not to think," Robert said chokily. "it 's only when one sees—" the pause he left was far more eloquent than any words.

"I know, I know."

She left the room. Up two good flights again unless she dropped that property child in the passage, and when she returned, Robert was standing with his coat on, waiting, hat in hand.

"Thank you so much for your kindness and your beautiful supper," he said, holding her hand. "You have reminded me of many things and made me forget the time and the hour. I have an

appointment I 'm bound to keep, at twelve-fifteen."

Vivid indignation swept over "Helen's" face, but she glossed it quickly with a smile.

"Go on forgetting."

"I 'm sorry, but you know I never break a promise,"—he bowed—"to my lady wife!"

The fog had lifted somewhat. The horse and man in the street woke at the banging of the door. Robert fell into the cab simply chortling, and surprised to find his heart was beating rather quickly.

He ran up his own staircase more like a boy than a man of nearly forty. "Are you awake? I 'm long past my time."

"Yes, I could n't sleep. I was afraid something would happen to you in the fog." Ruth turned a book face downward on the bed, and Robert sat on it.

"Kiss me. It did happen, but I am all right. It 's been the most amusing evening I 've had for years!"

"I 'm so glad, darling. The dinner or the play?"

"Both. No, neither." Then he told her of the comedy in which he had taken part. "I 'll bet you," he said, "there are four little nail marks in the palm of that lily white hand!"

"Mr. Conceit!" Ruth laughed rather against her will, and drew his face down to her own. His eyes gazed straight into hers without shifting.

"Awful temptation, was n't it, dear? Same old game, same old ancient bag of tricks—the heavy mother and the weak, childless man. Are you pleased your old boy came out of it so well?"

Ruth tried not to laugh. "Very! but I don't believe it was any temptation."

"You 're right. I hate the obvious! It was great fun all the same. I must look very young, Ruth. Do I look young?"

She smiled, nodding, "Quite young enough."

"Or do I only look green?"

"Not a bit green, thoroughly well seasoned; that 's part of the attraction."

"I kept wondering all the time what you 'd think of the situation."

"I do wonder still," Ruth said, "why you did it."

"Could hardly help myself." He walked to the door and went out; then he pushed it open again wide enough to show his face.

"I 'll tell you why," he said smiling, "If you really want to know. I did it to irritate the devil!"

The door finally closed on the wife's "Bless you!" And Ruth turned contentedly on her pillow. Some words from the book she had been reading were still before her eyes and she went to sleep smiling, thinking of them and Robert.

It's not so easy to ruin him with whom the pressure of Christ's hand lingers in the palm.

John Inglesant.

CHAPTER XIV

AND HIS DEVIL

LUKE LUMMOND was getting on in one way and not getting on in another. That is, as far as the law was concerned, he was quite satisfied and Rachel was happy; as far as the spirit was concerned, he was unhappy and Rachel was dissatisfied.

The delightful newness of the whole situation was over. He had got accustomed to being Haskell's devil, also accustomed to week-ends at Flittenbridge, likewise accustomed to being engaged. Haskell was a good man to work for. Flittenbridge was the jolliest place in the world. Rachel was—well, just Rachel. There was n't anybody could touch her! And yet, if the whole truth were known, something disagreed with his inside.

There was something that set up moral or mental indigestion. He felt, as a man might after staying a month at the Ritz, that the simple life was what he really craved. It struck him at times that his weekly allowance was more than he

wanted rather than less. Haskell was a bit superior. Flittenbridge was and always would be beyond his means. Rachel was perhaps too near the angels. He was continually straining up to reach something above him, and no one helped him on with friendly applause, for no one knew of the effort he was making.

The result of this was, of course, apparent to the outside world, and of course Lummond blamed the outside world for giving him food that he could not digest.

When he "groused" to Rachel, Rachel, thoroughly practical, recommended him at once to read Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* for his good spiritually, and to try a course of Turkish baths for his health physically; failing any result from such a delightful combination, she advised him to see a doctor.

Lummond combated this as ridiculous. He was all right, if only he were left alone. That was all he ever asked of any one. He wanted to eat, drink, sleep, work, play, in his own way, at his own time, and pending his own inclination. It was having to do things as other people liked that upset him. He 'd always been like that. No doubt it was very tiresome to be built in that fashion, but after all, "we are as God made us," so it was no use trying to be different.

Rachel, conscious of Anna and the candle, put her arms round his neck, and talked softly into his ear—of things he did not understand.

Lummond would kiss her passionately, fully believing that the whole difficulty of life would be solved on their marriage day.

He was being thwarted; he was being balked; it was n't natural to work as he did and see so little result of his labours. When would Rachel marry him?"

Rachel said she would marry him at once if he did n't mind being poor—and if her father would consent. She could never marry without his consent.

This produced fresh trouble. It just showed she cared more for her father than she did for him. If she loved him as he loved her, she would run away with him in spite of all the fathers in Christendom.

Rachel shook her head. Her wedding was to be a most brilliant ceremony with all the world to see and admire her choice,—no hole and corner affair to be whispered about with faltering tongues.

"Her choice" smiled, and felt pleased at the prospect of the world standing still to admire; perhaps it was worth waiting a little longer. He was doing better—yes a good deal better, in fact he was doing well. If he continued to do as well the following year, he should be in a position to marry, though he wanted her to understand that when she married him, he must feel she was giving up nothing in the way of comfort and luxury. He intended her to live as she had always lived. She must have a footman and a maid and a carriage.

Rachel had gazed at him then speechless with wonder. "You don't suppose I want those things so much?" she said. "They are very nice when they come naturally, but those are n't the things to make us happy."

"I don't think you could be happy without them."

"I! Luke, you can't think I care so much about things of that sort?"

"I don't care whether you do or not," he said. "I care enough for you to want to give them to you, and I shall not consider myself justified in asking you to fix the day unless I 'm able to keep you in the way you 're accustomed to. I 'm not going to have people say, 'Poor Rachel, what a bad marriage she 's made!'"

"But—" the mind so addressed was in a whirl, "just now you wanted me to run away with you without even Dad's consent."

"And you refused. Very well, the other alternative is a big wedding, and everything needful to keep such a dear little wife as you are going to be in the lap of luxury. But that, of course, will take time. However, given my health, you 'll see that I generally do what I set my mind on."

"But——"

"But me no buts, darling. I feel better already. You 've quite inspired me. It 's better to go on waiting, is n't it, and have everything jolly when we begin, than start in some beastly flat, five floors up, and have scarcely enough to pay the baker's man?"

"Lu—" holding the lappets of his coat, "I don't think you understand."

"Understand what?"

"Me."

"Oh, yes, I do, my dear. You are very sweet and good, I know, and you think you would n't mind being poor, but you don't know what it 's like and I do, and I 'm not going to have my wife, My Wife, do you hear that, Madam——",

"But your wife—listen—your wife does want a lot of things when she marries you. She does want to be rich—but not in the way you mean. She would hate to be poor—but it would n't be money poverty——"

He laughed. "You may take it from me," he said, "that money is the only thing that matters. Remember you have always had sufficient, all your life. I never have. If we have money, we shall have—everything."

"Oh, Lu darling, I don't, I can't agree with you! There are heaps and millions of things that make me happy, and money is n't wanted for any of them."

"What sort of things? I don't know them."

"Sunshine. Beautiful scenery—anything beautiful. Birds singing—I love birds—and books and pictures, and people like Ruth and Mary, and Anna and Mr. Haskell. I feel awfully happy when I see any of them."

"Exactly. They 've all got money! You can't enjoy books and pictures without money, and——"

"Yes you can—National Gallery and British Museum."

"And you can't go sightseeing without money."

"The Zoo and 'Christie's.'"

"It all comes back to what I said,—money! After all it 's going to be my married life as well as yours, so you 'd better let me start it in my own way, the way I think best."

In an affair of this kind you will notice the man generally considers the difficulties of the position are upon his side only; the woman has nothing to do but wait. To wait, always ready, always smiling, until he suddenly calls out, "Now then, one, two, three, and away!"

That there is any strain in this waiting posture of best foot forward all the time, he is loftily unconscious; also of the irritating attitude of onlookers he is usually sublimely ignorant; but the woman waiting for his signal has still to make herself pleasant on the daily round and doing the common task, as well as to keep her head when members of her own sex crowd round and come too near.

"Why this delay," they ask in loving anxiety for her welfare. "Don't keep him waiting too long, my dear, or you may live to regret it."

"I 'm quite ready to start," the woman answers, thrown momentarily off her guard. "I 'm only waiting for the signal."

"Oh, ho! So that is it? He 's the pro-

crastinator, is he? Take my advice and jog his memory, dear. We are only young once. Youth soon flies."

And then later.

"Not gone yet? Why your sisters are treading on your heels! You are looking a little tired and pale, we think. Is n't he ready now?"

"Quite ready, more than ready; he is urgent," she learns to say with a smile, "but having waited so long I don't see the need to hurry. It 's my delay this time!"

"And he doing so well!" a touch of pity in the tone.

"He 's got to do better," comes with a snap of irritation that disperses the crowd winking to one another, murmuring about pains in the temper, and sorrow for the poor young man who has waited so long and faithfully for such an exacting jade.

And still no signal.

Rachel Cremayne was no more immune from trials of this sort than any other feminine victim of a long engagement. She did not regard herself in the position of a "Clara," bound to a "Willoughby Pattern." She did not hear Lady Frances Frayle on the subject when she quoted to Mary Winyon, "It 's quite true, my dear, 'Egoists have good women for their victims; women on whose devoted constancy they feed; they drink it like blood.'" Nor the laughing response of a female rogue,

"I like Mr. Lummond myself, but I 'm sure he 'd go sour in milk——"

"In milk, Dolly dear? What can you mean?"

"I mean like the milk! I 'm sure he goes sour in thunder!"

Such quips and cranks, such jibs and jibes troubled Rachel not at all. She was not sorry for herself. She loved Lummond too well, and she loved waiting for him because every day she waited brought the one day nearer that when it dawned in all the brightness of its glory, would make those other days so well worth having lived.

To watch the corn grow or the blossom set; to draw hard breath over ploughshare or spade; to read, to think, to love, to pray—these are the things that make men happy.

CHAPTER XV

FACT COLLECTING

IF Luke was conscious of a desire for something different in his outward surroundings, Rachel was also conscious of desiring something more for him than he already possessed. Something inside her, which she liked to think was judgment or reason, told her that the difference would have to come from inside for Luke as for the rest of the world. And the opposite of this something suggested to her the changing of his externals, that by this process some door might be pushed open wide enough to admit a ray of light into the dark places of his earth.

With this idea in her mind she talked to Anna of impersonal cases, where people preferred to dwell in ground-floor rooms rather than live in attics with skylights.

Anna in the studio smiled. "Are you fond of Oliver?"

"Love him always, and when he says things like that, I could hug him."

An amused nod.

"Well, Anna, what would you do?"

"Let them live there."

"But suppose they are brother and sister and only have enough money to be comfortable if they keep together, and supposing she wants to live on the ground floor and be saved the stairs, and he wants to live on the top floor to get a good light for his pictures, because you see—he 's an artist——"

"Unless she 's got dropsy or elephantiasis, she 'd better live in the attic—much better for her. Besides, if he 's an artist, she ought to consider what helps him most."

"Well, then you think the attic and the skylight better for them both?"

"Much."

"Suppose the skylight gives her bad eyes?"

"She can wear a shade."

"Supposing she won't. Supposing she 's pig-headed."

"She had better cut it off and get another. Anyway, the artist ought n't to suffer."

"The man ought to have his own way?"

"In the general run of things you will find it leads to greater comfort in life for the man to have his own way rather than the woman, for this reason —a man cannot be happy without everything to make him happy, while a woman can be happy without anything to make her miserable. It is n't mine, I read it somewhere."

Silence, while Rachel thought over this piece of logic.

"Anyway, you feel the top floor would be best for them."

"I did not say 'anyway'; you said, 'if the man 's an artist.' "

"Well, one of them an artist—perhaps it 's the woman. If so, she wants the top floor."

"Ah! that materially alters the case."

"Now, Anna, why?"

He smiled what he meant to be an inscrutable smile, but Rachel quickly nodded appreciation of the thought behind the smile.

"It 's most—unfair!"

"*C'est la vie, Mademoiselle. C'est la vie.*"

"If the woman is the artist, is it better that the woman should be miserable on the ground floor with the man happy and no pictures painted, than that the man should be miserable on the top floor with the woman happy and lovely creations bringing in grist to the mill every day?"

"In one case the man would make the woman's life so intolerable that she would not be able to paint her pictures when she got to the top floor; in the other the woman, if she 's a wise woman, would find something to do on the ground floor that she could never have done so well on the top —at least she would say so."

Silence, while they looked at each other. "And you think that would be right?"

"No, I don't say right. I think it would make things easier for both."

Rachel took the cushion from behind her back

and flung it at Anna's head. "I never asked you which would be easiest. I asked you what would be best. I came to you for wisdom. It seems I came to the wrong place!"

Anna caught the cushion and sat on it. "Thanks very much," he said. "What 's the use of coming to me? I 'm a man—you 're a woman. I think the man ought always to have his own way."

"Even if it is n't the best way?"

"It 's the way he 'll learn the best way."

"By perhaps going the wrong?"

"By certainly going the wrong—by tumbling and falling, and cursing and losing his way, and finding it again, by scratching and tearing himself, by taking short cuts, and coming up bump against a stone wall at the end."

"And banging his poor head!"

"And banging his poor head. It 's what we 've all done or are doing. It 's only when we 've banged our heads sufficiently often against that stone wall at the end of our own way, that we turn in a pulpy and battered condition to try another way."

"Yet we don't remember."

"No. But the soul remembers."

"Anna! You are clever!"

He touched his head at the temple. "It 's the candle," he said. "It always burns bright for you."

She looked at him with her head sideways. "It seems to me that, according to you, women are much wiser and more highly developed than men,

and yet are quite incapable of helping them to develop too."

"You are more developed—you need n't look so pleased—it is n't your doing. In the process of evolution don't you stand at the top of Creation? Are n't you the very last lingering touch of the good God's hand? You are like the extra tuppence for polish when everything 's finished."

Rachel chuckled rather than laughed. The jump from the sublime to the ridiculous was so like Anna and so expressive of the spirit actuating him in all his ways.

"And that sister, if she 's right"—slowly—"can't help that brother except by letting him go his own way and perhaps hurting himself?"

"Perhaps? Pray that he may! Let her keep her light burning in the ground-floor room, if the man is a 'fact collector' and wants her to live there, and let her work and read and play in the consciousness of the light within. Let her get to know the occupants of the attics, who love sky-lights, that she may run up there when the ground-floor does n't want her. The man will probably either change or die, but if he does neither, she can be to him what Miss Nightingale was to the wounded soldiers—the wounded ones mark you—just 'the lady with the Lamp.' When they got well, they knew and said it was her doing. When they did n't, they knew, if they did n't say, it was due to some mischief inside—poison in the blood most likely."

CHAPTER XVI

ON A BANK HOLIDAY

THE Bishop of Shoreditch was walking arm in arm with Robert Haskell in Flittenbridge Park. Both of them had come down to please the General and play in his Bank Holiday cricket match. They met but seldom, though when they did, old threads were knotted up without loss of time in explanations.

School days and Oxford days bound the two together in a pleasant chain of memories. Since then their diversities of gifts and profession served but to emphasise the same spirit working through them both.

"I wish you 'd marry," Robert was saying. "It 's rough luck on the race when a man like you goes single."

The other shook his head. "Much rougher for the woman. I should have no time to give her when I 'm fit and well, and at my best, such as it is, she would never see me unless I were ill or out of work."

"That 's true. Marriage is rough on women.

I often wonder why they go in for it. I mean, of course, the thinking ones. What do they gain? A home, which they would probably have anyway. A position, which may or may not be an improvement on their own. The certainty of losing their independence — the uncertainty of finding a kindred spirit capable of governing in such fashion that to obey shall be a pleasure."

"Of course, there are other motives than these. You 've left out the strongest of all."

"Of course, *cela va sans dire.* But if it 's for love, what then? When you love any one, you want to be with them constantly, and that very natural desire, if indulged, may hamper and cripple them, or you, for the work in life. If jumped on and reduced to a commonplace level, even though you succeed in your work, you know you have let something tarnish that might have been a glory round you both."

"And then you wish I 'd marry!"

"Yes," Robert said, "in spite of all the drawbacks, I still wish you 'd marry. It would be so nice for some woman——"

"'T would be jolly nice for me." The Bishop let it go almost in spite of himself. "But I 'm wedded to the Church. I could n't commit bigamy. I could n't say to a woman, 'though I 'd gladly lay down my life for you, dear, I must live for the other!' If I was fond of her, I 'd want to be with her always as you say. If I was n't, well, better be single and think how nice it would be to

be married, than be married and think how nice it would be to be single!"

"You might find a woman who felt just like you—who 'd be as fond of you as you of her and who would understand."

"Ah! As yours does."

"As mine does—God bless her—and yet—" The two walked on in silence for a bit, and the Bishop repeated,

"And yet?"

"I 'm in a difficulty. I think I shall give up politics."

"Never. The country wants you."

"So does my wife. I can't give up the law. It means bread and butter for too many people and jam for her on Sundays, but politics now a days usually means personal gain in some way."

"Have you consulted her?"

Robert shook his head. "Not yet. I must make up my own mind. It 's like this—one can't disguise the fact, conceited as it sounds, that the more I 'm with her the better she is. Physically she is stronger, spiritually I am less weak. Now all I can see of her, comes practically to a few minutes in the day, half an hour at most in the mornings, seldom more than that at night, and an occasional lunch or dinner sneaked from the rush. She 's a wonderful woman, the best help a man ever had, and her reward is to see less of me than she sees of any one else, when she wants to see more. Also the best return I can make her for all

she has done and has been and is to me—is to 'get on' socially, legally, politically, so that her eyes may shine with pride when we meet. And she suffers—she suffers I know, and yet never tells, because the real remedy for her suffering lies in my companionship. If I don't stand again, I shall have more time to give her, which will make us both happier, and may make her well. Do you comprehend?"

A nod.

"Am I wasting the best of gifts, am I losing the substance for the shadow if I pursue political fame? or should I be an unprofitable servant if I buried that talent in the garden and spent more time by her sofa at home?"

A shake of the head implied the Bishop comprehended the difficulty.

"Which do you think she would wish?"

"She would wish what was best for me, she would n't think of herself—she never does; that 's why I 'm obliged to think for her."

"Best for you in what way?"

"Every way—not this world only but the next. She 's in touch with the infinite, and I 'm not, except through her. I think that 's the gong. We shall have to go in."

"One word—how 's Lummond? Doing well?"

"Very useful."

"Any good—legally?"

"Quite good—legally."

"Otherways?"

"Otherways—you 'll be able to judge for yourself."

At breakfast the next morning the Cremayne family were all quite sure it was going to be a lovely day for the match,—Flittenbridge married *versus* Flittenbridge single. The sky was a bit cloudy and the glass was going down, but neither of these trifles affected the spirits of the players. The Bishop allowed that he had been pessimistically inclined on first wakening and had taken to counting his mercies as a corrective for being in such a bad way.

The family laughed and thought it a good idea, judging from the result.

Lummond did n't laugh. He thought it a rotten silly thing to go "counting your mercies"; besides the expression savoured of cant.

He did not think it was going to be anything of a day—probably pour with rain from eleven o'clock onwards. No, he was n't going to play. He could not imagine anything more foolish than spending a holiday standing for hours in the sun.

"Thought you said it was going to rain."

"Well, worse still, standing in the rain, fielding all day with a lot of yokels who never send a ball worth the trouble of catching."

The momentary pause was broken by Mr. Haskell.

"That 's all very fine, Lummond. We know quite well why you are n't playing. Lucky dog!"

Rachel threw a grateful glance across the table and back to the man at her side.

"Of course. He 's going to help me keep the score. Are n't you, Luke?"

"You don't mean to say you 've promised to score? Why good gracious——"

But she nudged him, the sort of nudge that could tell him heaps of things—an' he would hear.

"Don't you like cricket?" said the Bishop pleasantly, "or is it only——"

"No, I don't. Twenty-two full grown men playing about all day with a ball—childish, it seems to me." He caught Anna's eye, which appeared to smile appreciation and say "go on—go on, you are worth listening to." If it did say so, it had the contrary effect, for Lummond veered round, putting his hand on Rachel's. "I daresay I 'm wrong—" and he smiled, a most sweet and engaging smile. "It 's my point of view, that 's all."

His smile was at once responded to round the table.

"Quite right, Luke. You stick up for your own opinions."

"I mean to, thank you!" At this reply buds of encouragement and appreciation fell dead off their stalks, so that many rose and left the room, having nothing more to eat or to say.

Rachel collected crumbs in her hand silently and went over to the window. She threw them

to possible birds and stood presumably waiting for them to come.

"How I hate a Bank Holiday!" Luke spoke to the only other occupant, still sipping his coffee.

"Pretty trying."

"Everybody 's always in the most awful temper and pretending they like it. Besides, it 's going to be a beastly day."

Anna looked out on the sunshine.

"Oh, yes, it 's fine enough now. That 's the worst of these bright mornings. Means rain later, just when you are beguiled out to enjoy yourself. Rachel, you are n't going to score, are you?"

"It 's the only way I thought I could make myself useful."

Luke got up. "I don't want you to be useful. I like you to be ornamental. Let 's be ornaments together." He put his arm round her shoulder and twisted her towards the room, looking at her with adoring eyes. "*Regardez!* Dresden china!"

Anna regarded, and Rachel laughed, trying to free herself.

Luke held her tight. "Smile at me—no not like that—wider, much wider! More wideness in the thickness—" and Anna laughed into his cup. "Are n't you pleased with me? Darling, don't you love me any more?" His voice had a pathetic break.

"Yes, I love you, when you 're nice like this."

"Ain't I always nice? Beg pardon—am I not always nice?"

"Not when you come down infecting everybody with your horrid, gloomy views."

"Now I like that." He dropped her shoulder. "Will somebody have the goodness to tell me WHY the Bishop may come down and infect the whole company with his opinions and be loudly applauded, and I may n't suggest in the humblest way that I don't agree with him entirely eye to eye, without being hissed out of existence? WHY?"

It was impossible to treat him seriously, and his listeners refrained from the attempt.

"Why, I repeat, is it absolutely godlike to say, I think we shall have a fine day, and perfectly devilish to say we shall have a wet one? Why, answer me that. You can't! Beg pardon—you can not."

"Don't be an idiot."

"Do not—try to be more grammatical, dear."

Rachel punched his head. "It 's because one braces us all up and the other depresses us all down; one makes us all bright and gay, even if it is going to rain later on—the other quite damps our spirits, even if it 's going to be fine."

"I put it to you, Anna, is this fair? One man being possessed of the 'Missionary' spirit must needs try and make everybody think the same as he does, and he is, of course, a 'Wonderful Influence for Good.' Luke's voice was filled with unction as he spoke. "Another and humbler individualist like myself merely wishes to retain his own opinion on matters in general, and the

weather in particular. He asks for no following. He merely states what he thinks and thinks what he pleases, and he 's considered 'no earthly' to anybody."

Anna twinkled, as he always did at a sparring match.

"You 're not to encourage him, Anna! He 's a gloomy, despondent pessimist, always ready to see the worst of everything and everybody. He attracts troubles and difficulties by looking out and watching for them. It 's enough to make the sun hide behind a cloud only to see his face."

"It 's the only face I 've got. We can't all be as good-looking as you, dear."

Rachel tried not to appear mollified, but laughed in spite of herself. "It 's a good thing your bark is so much worse than your bite."

"Oh, I 'm not a bad sort. Take me all round, there are a lot worse than me."

"I don't want you to be 'not worse' than a lot of others, I want you to be better than anybody!"

"And I want you just as you are—that 's the difference between us, you see. Just as you are without one flea—at least I hope——"

"Luke, really!"

"Well, is that too much to hope? Say you won't score to-day to please me and I 'll start 'counting up my mercies' to please you. What a thing to do!"

"Well, you don't mind counting out your grumbles the whole day long and looking at every-

thing and everybody with a tortured vision; why should you think it so extraordinary somebody else sees everything 'clear and plain'?"

"That 's so like you! My sight 's wrong now. Tortured you said. My way of looking at things is——"

"Tortured, as I said, dwarfed, warped, jaundiced!"

"Don't lose your temper."

"I 'm not thinking of being careless with anything so valuable. Because you 've got out of bed the wrong side, you think we have all done the same."

"I don't. I 'm not sufficiently intimate with ——"

"Lu, be quiet! You prove yourself wrong every time you open your mouth. Your view of life upsets and irritates us all to such a degree that we begin to fit in with your horrid, disgusting way of looking at us. We really become what you think we are, and somebody else's——"

"The Bishop's!"

"The Bishop, if you like, or anybody else looks at us all with kind eyes and charity in his heart, and we all feel flowing over with the milk of human kindness, and then you wonder why we pat him on the back, and——"

"Well, what do you do to me?"

"We want you to be kind too."

"Ain't I k— beg pardon—am I not kind to you? Anna, tell her I don't mean to be unkind!" But

Anna collected his papers and cleared out of the fray.

"I don't mean to be unkind, Rachel, I don't really."

"You don't mean, but you are all the same. You never help us to do things cheerfully for other people. You won't do anything yourself, and you won't let me."

"What 's wrong now?"

"You won't play cricket, and you won't——"

"Because I 'd a thousand times sooner sit with you and talk to you and be nice to you if you 'd let me. Is that being unkind?"

"You won't let me score or do anything to help. You won't enjoy anything because it 's a Bank Holiday, and you hate a Bank Holiday, and you won't let anybody else enjoy it if you can help it. I call it abominably unkind."

"Rachel, I don't mean it! I don't really mean it. I won't play cricket because it takes me away from you; I don't want you to score because it takes you away from me. It 's because I care, darling; it 's all because I care so dreadfully. I want to have you always, and I hate everything and everybody that gets between. Won't you believe me? That 's the whole trouble, Rachel. Say you won't score to-day, and I promise faithfully, on my solemn word of honour, I won't grumble or complain or be anything but nice as nice. Say you won't!"

"I must keep the score part of the time because

I said I would, and we must help with the show. We always do things for people on this sort of day because Dad likes us to. Then we can sit together——"

"If it 's fine."

"It 's going to be fine, and even if it 's wet, we can sit together and be very snug—" here she took his arm and put her head near his shoulder—"very snug, if it 's wet, sharing your umbrella!"

And as the remains of breakfast were about to be moved away, you might think this pleasing prospect was the final word on the subject.

Not so. Master Lummond foresaw the horrors of a drip down his neck, and at once opined that his umbrella was hardly large enough for two. She had better bring her own and sit under it—then was amazed when she took her arm away, reared her head, and ran full tilt upstairs.

Doant'e spile to-day's blew skies wi' to-morrow's clouds.—*Devonshire Proverb.*

CHAPTER XVII

THE INSTINCT OF POWER

THE announcement that Mr. Haskell, K.C., M.P., would probably not seek re-election came as a blow not only to his constituents but to his party.

He appeared to be so firm in his decision, they feared even the tempting bait of office would have no wavering effect upon him.

When questioned as to his reason, he curtly said it was a matter of health, and only the Bishop knew that it was not his own health he referred to—but even when consulted, his Lordship had given no advice.

"To his own Master he standeth or falleth" was true of Robert Haskell, even in little things.

Then he made a most surprising suggestion, first to Ruth and later on to Rachel. He suggested that Lummond should take his place.

Lummond! Both the women gasped. He let them gasp, and the obstacles gradually disappeared as fast as they came in sight.

Ruth could not think that Wrottonbro' would

like the exchange, and Rachel agreed. Rachel could not think where the money was coming from and Ruth agreed, for the moment.

Then Rachel was sent home to think about the plan before a word was said to any one else, for, according to Mr. Haskell, she was the one that mattered; if she approved, he would speak to Luke; if she condemned, he would say nothing.

Rachel's mind flew swiftly over the pros and cons. For herself she would love it—love the excitement, love the contest, love the situation of Luke as prospective candidate, and love the temporary political atmosphere, even if it did not extend permanently beyond the polling day.

But Luke? Was he equal to it? If Robert Haskell found it hard to work at both law and politics, would Luke find it less hard? Did she even want him to? And if he gave his best to both, what would be left for her? Not that she would stand in the way, but she must just face the position that if there were difficulties for Robert Haskell, there would be three times the amount of difficulties for Lummond.

Finally she kept an open mind in the matter and decided to be pleased whichever way Luke resolved was best.

Mr. Haskell unfolded his scheme. Mr. Lummond was apathetic. He alleged it was of course by no means certain that the party at Wrottonbro' would adopt him, even on their Member's advice. The Member agreed but also felt Luke

would stand a very good chance if he liked to try. Then came the question of L. S. D. Luke saw the difficulties of even a borough election. He had saved very little money and that little was to help him to marry.

Mr. Haskell had foreseen this side of the question and brushed it aside as of no account. If Luke would like to stand, all expenses should be defrayed by the present Member. Luke's apathy gave place at this point to a modified rapture. He would enjoy the fight of an election immensely, and Mr. Haskell was too kind but—Mr. Haskell cut him short, "Go and talk it over with Mademoiselle," he said. "See what she advises and let me know later on."

Luke shook his head. "Quite unnecessary, thank you. I 'm very much obliged, and it 's awfully good of you to think of me, but I can't do it. I 've quite made up my mind. There 's no need to talk it over with any one."

"Don't you think you owe it to her not to refuse so decisively without her approval?"

Lummond laughed. "I always make up my own mind," he said. "I know how I feel about it, so it would n't make any difference what she said."

The two men sat looking at one another. The face of the one was stern, expressive of strength and power; the face of the other was gay with confidence and pride. Luke could not understand wanting to consult any one; to him it would be a

confession of weakness. Robert could not comprehend coming to a decision affecting Ruth in any degree without consulting Ruth. Then he said abruptly,

"Like a day to think it over?"

"Thanks very much. I 'm awfully obliged, but I 've quite made up my mind. I could n't think of it."

He saw Rachel that evening but did not mention the matter, though she was burning to know if anything had been said.

About a week later she hinted that it would be nice if he were interested in something outside "law," and was told he was—he was interested in her.

She laughed. "Such an old story"; it must be something more exciting.

Lummond asked what sort of thing?

"Well, politics!"

Curious she should say that. Robert Haskell had had the same idea.

This set her off. How too nice! Would he really think of it? What had Mr. Haskell said?

He told her briefly and without comment. The enthusiasm was all her own.

Was n't he pleased? Did n't it show how much was thought of him? Could it be possible—or did he feel the expense would be an obstacle?

Luke shook his head. The expense would be no obstacle. Haskell had offered to pay.

"How can you take it so quietly?" Rachel said

with shining eyes. "It 's just the most exciting thing since we got engaged. Why, it will be the making of you; solicitors love briefing M. P.' s; and no expense! Why, it won't even put off our marriage!"

Luke sat quite calm, barely even smiling at the prospect.

"I 've refused," he said with a stifled yawn. "I could n't possibly do it."

That awful "plump" down into the depths was becoming a frequent experience for Rachel in her talks with Luke. Yet she was always surprised at the sensation when it overtook her.

"Why, dear?" she said gently.

"Oh, because I could n't be beholden to him for one thing, and for another—to tell the honest truth—because I like to stand on my own. I don't want to be Haskell's devil in every walk of life."

"But is n't it rather a 'chance' for a young man?"

"Oh, yes, quite—very good of him to think of it."

Silence.

"You don't seem satisfied with my decision."

"I don't feel—if you 'll let me say so—that your reasons are adequate for refusing such an extraordinarily good thing."

"Well, of that, my dear, I 'm afraid you 'll have to let me be judge. I 'm sorry you don't approve, but it won't alter my opinion by a hair's breadth, so you need not think it will—or try."

"Luke! what a tone to speak to me in!"

"I 'm sorry, but it 's quite useless this incessant arguing over matters already decided."

The depths seemed deeper than ever before. She was losing her foothold, and did the most natural thing in the world: she took his hand and pulled him close to her for safety.

"Don't, don't!" she said. "I can't bear it when you speak like that. Here 's a lovely prospect opened out before us, and instead of its being a pleasure to look at it and discuss it, even if you refuse, you are dismissing it like a tiresome worry that has nothing to do with me!"

"My dear child, if you spent your whole and entire day in the Law Courts listening to what you are pleased to think pretty discussions, you would not want to hear a single word on your return home that however remotely reminded you of law and arguments. I 've decided not to stand for Parliament at present. I 'm sorry if you are disappointed. Some day perhaps I shall see my way, and then I hope you 'll be a dear little wife and help me as I shall want you to. "Don't pull away from me. I 'm tired—perhaps cross. Am I cross, darling? If so, kiss me un-cross."

Something was wrong somewhere. Was it he; was it she? Was her reason or her judgment at fault? Did she "expect too much," in expecting to "talk over" pleasantly everything pertaining to their mutual life, or was the fault his? Perish

the thought! She would a thousand times sooner feel in the wrong and start the work of correction in herself than feel—well the opposite.

She went to tea with Ruth. And after tea, Ruth gave the comforting order "Not at Home" to any one else, and then proceeded to tell Rachel of a change in Robert's plans consequent on a visit to her from no less a person than the Prime Minister himself.

"He came to see me, quite alone. What do you think of that? He sent a note, first, to know if I would be disengaged. Rachel, he was too nice about Robert; said what I knew before, that there was no one like him, and as a personal favour, would I use my influence to keep him in Parliament. If so, he hoped to see his way to making it worth his while before very long."

"Ruth!"

"Yes, was n't it perfectly beautiful! He was so charming about us both! Said he knew that official positions often meant more for the woman really than for the man, and that in our case my wishes meant more to the Member for Wrottonbro' than anything he could offer!—don't weep, Rachel—and that if I could encourage him to go on politically, it would have far more effect than if he or any of the Cabinet asked him. In short, he wanted to make sure I was on his side and implied that the two of us would pull Robert over."

"What did you say?"

"I said Robert had thought it all out and had decided to give up for reasons of health; and then his eyes sort of glinted through me. 'Whose health,' he said, 'his own, or——'"

"I said his own, of course — at least I thought——"

"'But are you sure?'

"I caught the idea in his mind and said, 'Are you feeling it is for me, that I stand in his way?'

"'My dear lady,' he said, 'it was only an idea. We don't want him to knock up. He 's far too valuable a man. But I 'm afraid we are selfish—fault of our sex, no doubt. If you want him to stay in Parliament, he will stay. If you want him out, we shall have to give him up, though none of us believe there 's anything wrong with his health.'"

"Oh, Ruth! Throwing the responsibility onto you!"

"*Toujours la femme*, I promised to see what I could do, and he said would I send him a line as soon as I could, and I might count on him to offer Robert something if—I said he won't stay for loaves and fishes; he 'll only stay if— He was standing then and he took my hand.

"'Exactly,' he said. 'If you want him to!'

"It was n't what I was going to say, of course, but it was nice of England's Prime Minister to say that to an invalid wife, was n't it?"

Rachel drew her chair closer. "Do you mind

telling me whether you told him when he came home, and if so, how?"

"I did n't tell him till he became suspicious of my silence and wanted to know the reason of it."

"What did you say?" Rachel was breathless for hints.

"I said I had had a visitor during the day who had given me something to think of——"

"And roused his curiosity? Clever woman!"

"It made him think he wanted to know what I was thinking more than anything else."

"Oh, Ruth, do go on!"

"Well then, I told him who had been here and he wanted to know why."

"Did you keep quite calm, or did you get excited?"

"No, I wanted him to be excited."

"And was he?"

"Interested, I think, and pleased, and a little gratified."

Rachel clasped her hands tight together as her habit was when thrilled. "And did you find out?"

"Yes."

"Is it his health?"

"No."

"Ruth, I don't like to ask more."

There was a tender look on the wife's face and her voice was very soft.

"He thought I should get well quicker, if he could take more care of me—more! That was what was in his mind. He was going to give up

the chance of being a great man that he might have more time to play with me. Rachel, I wish you would n't get so soppy about the eyes."

"Never mind my eyes. What did he decide?"

"He did n't decide. He left me to decide, because he wanted to do whatever would really give me most pleasure, and they were n't empty words. So in the evening I wrote a note and said it was settled."

"Ruth, I think I should die of pride if I had a husband like that."

"No, dear, you would n't. Like to see the answer we got? It 's full of pretty things. Robert has made a copy and carries it in his pocket, though it 's nearly all about his wife!"

And as within the human heart . . . there is the intense instinct of love, which, rightly disciplined, maintains all the sanctities of life, and, misdirected, undermines them, . . . so there is in the human heart an inextinguishable instinct, the love of power, which, rightly directed, maintains all the majesty of law and life, and misdirected, wrecks them.—*Sesame and Lilies.*

CHAPTER XVIII

THE INSTINCT OF LOVE

THERE came a day when General Cremayne had a long and serious talk with his daughter Rachel, a talk that was full of kindness, full of common sense, yet to the sensitive, listening ears also full of dissatisfaction.

With her head Rachel agreed entirely, with her heart she combated every word. She found it difficult to explain with any hope of being understood, that Luke delayed the wedding day until he could provide her with a carriage and a footman and a maid, because her father's shaggy brows failed to conceal the amusement in his eyes as he said, "Do you want these things so much?"

To say, "No, I don't care twopence about them unless they come naturally," was to add another poser to the situation. Then, "if you don't care in that way, why not settle the day? or if you don't care in the other way, why not break off the engagement altogether?" would be the obvious answer.

They sat confronting each other for some little

time, each longing to clear up the difficulty, yet half fearful of putting their thoughts into words, lest fogs and mists of distrust should be the result.

"I want your happiness, child—you know that. If you think he 'll make you happy, marry him now he 's got a footing at the bar. I 'll make it possible for you to be comfortable. If you don't think he 'll make you happy, don't have anything more to do with him; no shilly-shallying; just break it off and I 'll stand by you."

So simple,—so like the General.

So extraordinarily difficult for the daughter.

"Dad! You see it 's like this, I firmly believe he 's got it in him to rise really high, and I 'm not sure—I can't make up my mind—whether marriage will be a help or a hindrance to him. If it would be a help, I would marry him to-morrow; if it would hinder, I would delay as long as needs be—can you understand?"

The General, remembering his own hot-headed youth and the fiery spirit of the then future Mrs. Cremayne, found it not so very easy to understand this very sensible dallying with the pros and cons of a position he would have long ago, had he been Luke, taken by force.

"How do you think marriage could hinder him?"

"I don't—what I mean is, I 'm not certain that he feels it would be a help."

"Robert Haskell says it would. He 's doing very well and would probably do better if——"

"Yes, Robert Haskell——"

The General flung an arm round her shoulder, "Are you quite sure you 're content?"

"Yes, Dad, I am. If I feel you are all content. I can't bear it when I feel you are not happy about us. I suppose it 's silly, but I like to have the whole support of my family. Is n't it quite natural?"

The General said "quite" but with a movement of the under jaw reminiscent of the time when Mrs. C. did n't care a d—n what her family thought. No doubt he was falling into that sign of old age, in considering the customs of his own generation infinitely superior to the present one.

"I wonder whether"—the General walked to the window and back again—"whether you could induce him to take more interest in the place. He seems perfectly happy for me to do everything, and of course I 'm glad enough to have so easy-going a landlord. Still it is his place and I 'd like to feel he appreciates one's efforts."

Rachel said nothing.

"I get him to walk round with me sometimes, but he seems to keep his eyes shut—never sees a roof wants mending, does n't know a weed from a turnip, barely notices a tree blown down, never remarks on what I 've done or needs doing—what 's the cause? Does n't he care about the old place, or is he thinking of you?"

"I don't know. I think the law absorbs him."

"Well, see what you can do. I don't want him

to spend—it is n't that, I 'm only too pleased to indulge my own hobbies—but I 'd like to see him taking some interest. 'T would be better for you too, my dear. There! run away. If you want help, come to me."

The General went to his wife's sitting-room and sat down by her writing table.

"I 've just been talking to Rachel. Gave her a piece of my mind."

"Did you, dear?"

"Yes, very satisfactory on the whole. The delay is caused by his desire to indulge her with every luxury. We can't complain of that. He wants—to put it baldly—to start her with a maid and a footman—and what was the other thing? Oh, yes, a motor—no a carriage, I think, she said."

"Any girl marrying the owner of a place like this would expect such things naturally, but does Rachel?"

"I don't think so, but he 's set his mind on giving her a good time from the start. It 's d fficult for her to urge forward if he hangs back for however laudable a reason."

"You think she really cares about him?"

"'Pon my soul, yes. Better if she cared less—in more commonplace fashion, I mean. She cares so much that she 'll stand aside to leave him free for a successful future, if needs be! I got in a word on my own account—about the place. Told her to try and interest him. She quite sees, she 's very sensible."

"Yes, Rachel 's very sensible."

"Did the Bishop say anything to you?"

"No, I said things to him. I think he talked to Rachel."

"Well, it 's her affair. I suppose she knows what she 's doing. She need n't marry him unless she wants to."

Mrs. Cremayne sighed. "Of course I should personally feel happier if he 'd been taught not to bring mud into the house. I can't think a man who stalks in at the door without brushing his boots, and leaves great dirty footmarks wherever he steps can possibly make a satisfactory husband. Perhaps I 'm fastidious, perhaps I 've been spoilt."

The General bridled, or whatever it is an elderly man can do suggestive of bridling. Then, as if to contradict the notion, he put his hands in his pockets and stood feet apart upon the hearth-rug, a very manly attitude, and rasped his throat.

Mrs. Cremayne said, "You always so considered my wishes in these ways that I can't imagine what it would be like to have to overlook faults in the master of the house that one would n't forgive in any one else. I feel Rachel is always making excuses for Luke—excuses that I would n't have made for you."

A little pink flush brightened the lady's face as she spoke, and the General surveyed her as a man does who is fond of a woman.

"Rotten sort of a man that requires it, my dear, though I daresay I 've often given you cause—still

I know—" He came over behind her and tipped her chair back, so that her feet were just off the floor,—"I know you 'd be the first to defend me, just like Rachel, if I wanted defence."

"Reginald! Put me down at once! Supposing a gardener sees! Put me down, dear, one of the children may come in. Oh, don't tip me back so far, Reginald! Really!"

The General ruled his household with a rod of iron, or liked to fancy he did. His wife ruled him in a rainbow of love. The result was harmonious —not at all monotonous, as some people might suppose.

And Isaac took Rebekah and she became his wife and he loved her.—*The Old Testament.*

CHAPTER XIX

RACHEL HAS AN IDEA

THE dower house in Flittenbridge Park was empty.

Captain Adams, having nearly broken his neck one day by falling headlong down-stairs, had been conveyed first to a hospital and then into a home. His sister could not stay to face the neighbourhood alone, and also felt it would be better for her brother to start afresh somewhere else after his recovery.

They had only had the house on a yearly tenancy, so that it was now in Lummond's hands, and the subject of much discussion at the present moment with him and Rachel.

Rachel had an idea—when was she without one, as the boys used to say, and yet each presented to their notice always had an air of freshness, as though each were the first-born of a young and virile brain. Rachel's present offspring fortunately found favour in the eyes of Lummond. It was this: That he, Lummond, should put in a caretaker—a trustworthy caretaker—and that he

should by degrees do up the old house as a future domicile for Mr. and Mrs. Lummond.

They would have to live in town, of course, but this arrangement would also enable him to keep in touch with his property and give him the inestimable boon of sleeping two or three nights a week out of London, and "on his own"—to use his favourite expression.

Lummond showed real interest and pleasure in the scheme. He went even farther than Rachel. He said he would do up a couple of rooms at once for his own immediate use and run down whenever he had the chance. Her people had always been most awfully nice to him, but it would be ripping to feel he was his own master in his own house, cock of his own walk and crowing from his own d. h., so to say.

Rachel was delighted. A home in prospect—and such a pretty old home—seemed to bring her wedding within the scheme of practical politics. Besides—most important of all—it made Luke happy and gave him something to think about other than law.

The next thing was to find a reliable couple to caretake.

Luke wrote from town that they had suddenly "fallen into his lap," as the saying goes. He had been called upon by a Mrs. Waters, who said that, having seen his name so often in the papers, she had ventured to bring herself to his notice. She had been his nurse when he was a baby.

Luke said, "No, I had an Ayah for my nurse. She brought me from India——"

"Quite right, Sir, quite right, but I was the little maid that waited on you all the same, and after the black woman was sent home, I took charge of you, but you would n't remember—you were too young. My name, Sir, was Mary Smith, and I left to get married when you was barely four."

Luke was only slightly interested until the dame recalled some incidents of his childhood and made him laugh. Then she said she 'd been job-cooking since her husband's death—was a wonderful good cook, scarcely anything she could n't do—and strong? "Bless you, Sir, I never have anything the matter with me—never have had since my boy was born."

"Oh, you have a son?"

"Yes, Sir, and a good son he is to me. Started life as hall boy he did with Sir Geoffrey Jeffries, then second footman to Lady Harriet James, after that went to Russia as Colonel Zouche's valet. No, he could n't have a character that was so hard for him. Colonel Zouche was dead, and Lady Harriet had married again, and the funny thing was they could n't either of them remember the name of the gentleman. They 'd heard it—Oh yes—they 'd been very much interested at the time, but of course they did n't know then as it would be useful for a reference.

"Now? Oh, now Alf was in a nursery garden and doing wonderful."

Luke told Mrs. Waters he was very glad to have seen her, and she could call again next day, bringing Alfred with her.

Alfred made an equally good impression. He was a "regular handy man," that was what he called himself. Valeting was, of course, his profession, but there was n't any sort of job could beat him. Carpenter? not to make perhaps—but to mend and do up! Why he 'd learnt French polishing from a friend in his spare time. And gardening? Well, Mr. Farmer at the Nurseries could tell about that.

It was a miracle—that was what Luke wrote to Rachel. He 'd got a couple who would look after him and his interests indoors and out. Delightful old woman about forty-five, who could cook and housemaid him, and her son, who would valet him and work the garden. Luke was quite excited, said he would be down for the week-end, and Rachel must come over for tea and inspect his new treasures as soon as they were settled in.

Rachel too was excited. It was so nice to find Luke taking such an interest in something that was n't "legal" and she hoped great things from this new departure. Luke moved his effects from the Manor House to his cottage in the grounds, and when arranged, invited the Cremayne family to come and inspect.

The valet brought in the tea and behaved himself faultlessly. Mrs. Waters beamed when the kitchen was visited, where cleanliness prevailed

and shouted at you from every pot and pan, shelf and cupboard.

"Don't you think I 'm in luck?" Luke said, as he saw his guests depart, and they all agreed.

"Yes," and "Rather," but "she looks very young for forty-five," Rachel added. "And he strikes me as rather old for her son," said Mrs. Cremayne, "unless, of course, she married very young."

"She did, oh, she did," Lummond said, "and she 's a ripping cook. No, I did n't bother about a character. She 's only been jobbing, you see. What decided me was her knowing me when I was an infant; tells me all sorts of funny things. I 'll be with you for dinner. Thanks awfully. *Au revoir.*" He saw them through the gate and then went back to the house.

"What do you think, Rachel?"

"Mother, I don't trust either of them!"

"Nor I. They 're a pair of frauds, and the worst is——"

"I know. The woman 's already got Luke under her thumb. What am I to do?"

Does the serpent enter every Eden? Even such a little one as this?

The General's advice to wife and daughter was to give Luke a hint, but not to press the point, as they had no proofs and Luke might resent any suspicions cast on an ancient retainer.

"That 's just what I don't believe she is," said

Mrs. Cremayne, "any more than I believe that man 's her son. They 're a pair of frauds, and they 've got round Luke so that he would sooner doubt us than them."

"Where did he get them from?"

"Goodness knows! They arrived one day with some garbled tale of having nursed him when a baby, and he swallowed it all like Gospel. He does not really know anything about them except what they choose to tell him. Don't you think you could say something, dear?"

The General laughed. "I think Rachel 's the person most concerned."

"I 'd tell him in a minute," Rachel said, "if it would do any good, but I know it would n't. Still I don't want him to be burgled——"

"Or us murdered in our beds," said Mrs. Cremayne.

"What do you think, Anna, is it better to warn him, or leave him to find out for himself?"

"The latter," Anna said in his deliberate way, "will relieve you of a disagreeable necessity—will probably take longer—but will be more effectual in the end."

"We don't want to wait to be murdered," Mrs. Cremayne said again.

When Rachel gave Luke the hint over dessert that night, he flung back his head and roared. It was the funniest thing he 'd heard for a long time. She 'd barely seen Mrs. Waters at all, and only seen the man when he brought in tea. How could

she possibly form an opinion of either of their characters. It was too absurd.

"You 're so quick you could take in their appearance at a glance, I know," he said, "but their characters— No, darling, you can't impose your cleverness on me to that extent. I feel jolly lucky to have got them."

"It 'll be jollier still when we are all burgled," Rachel said.

"Or murdered in our beds," came from the head of the table.

Luke turned to share this amusing joke.

"You are n't serious?" he asked.

"My dear boy, I think it 's risky. I don't feel they are actually burglars or criminals of any sort, but they certainly did not inspire me with confidence"—Here the lady caught her husband's eye and was told therein she had said enough, so ended with, "However it 's your affair, and if you are satisfied, that is enough for us." Then she spoke of other things.

Luke went off with Anna to finish his last cigar after saying good-night to his hosts, and there he gave vent to his feelings as a man with a legal training.

"It 's an extraordinary thing," he said, "the way women will get hold of an idea and stick to it in spite of every fact to the contrary. Both Mrs. Cremayne and Rachel suspect those servants of mine of being frauds, and nothing will alter their opinion—I can see that—yet they have n't a shadow of proof."

"Women are like that," Anna murmured as if bored.

"They are. I see it so much, you know, in my profession. They 'll swear black is white and when you cross-question them as to reasons for their knowledge, they say they know because they feel it! Nothing else. They 'll condemn or acquit anybody according to their feelings. My poor servants are in their black books already, I can see."

"What does it matter? They 're in your white ones, and you 've got facts and reasons."

"Rather! Why old Mary nursed me as a kid. I say, I suppose it can't be jealousy?"

Anna puffed three times into the fire, and only made a slight leftward movement with his head.

"I shall certainly keep them. They suit me down to the ground."

"I certainly should," Anna agreed in a tired voice, "best thing you can do."

So Luke went home comforted to find old Mary sitting up for him, having just put a hot bottle in his bed for fear he should be cold.

Now the man's work for his own home is, as has been said, to secure its maintenance, progress, and defence; the woman's to secure its order, comfort, and loveliness.—*Sesame and Lilies.*

CHAPTER XX

AND SO HAS AN OLD FRIEND

ONE morning there came to General Cremayne a letter from a man in India, telling him he was about to send his two elder boys to the preparatory school near Flittenbridge, where he himself had begun his education a quarter of a century ago, and asking the General if he would extend the same kindness and hospitality to his small sons that had meant so much to him when he was a little lad.

The letter was read aloud to Mrs. Cremayne, who said, "Effell?—Peter John, as we always called him? Dear Peter John! Children, do you remember him?"

The children looked painfully blank and their mother smiled. "No, of course you would n't. Rose and Tom were his friends. Goodness, how time flies! Fancy Peter John having sons old enough to go to school! Write at once, dear, and say they may come here as often as they like—half-holidays and Sundays, just as their father did."

The General grunted acquiescence. "Whom did he marry? I 've forgotten. Was n't there some fuss?"

"Not really a fuss. His mother did n't like the girl. She was all right, I believe, but not quite, quite——"

"Second-rate, was n't she, or fast?"

"Something of that sort. I don't remember what it was. Anyway the boys will be welcome; you can tell Peter John with my love."

Lummond, who was staying in the house a few days, listened in silence, and Rachel knew from his face that he only refrained from speech till such time as they should be alone. When he took her arm for a stroll round the garden, sure enough he began:

"More pensioners on your father's goodness, I see! Extraordinary to me the way people ask favours—either for themselves or their relations. Can't understand it at all."

"Can't you, Luke? I don't call that a favour—about the two boys I mean."

"Well, I do. Why should this place be the dumping ground of every sort and kind of person who wants a free bed, free board, free advice, free holidays, in fact, free leave to do anything they like? I think it 's astounding! Why all the time I 've known your family I 've never known them refuse any request, no matter how inconvenient."

Rachel smiled. "Have n't you really? But is n't that a nice thing to be able to say?"

"Nice, you call it? Perfectly preposterous! Some people have no consciences, I think."

"But, Luke, what 's the use of having a place like this if it is n't to give everybody else a good time?"

"Well, of course, as long as your father 's got it he can do as he likes, but you need n't think, my dear child, that I shall ever allow it to be a Nursing Home and a Convalescent Hospital and an Alms House—so you can make your mind easy on that score."

"But I like it, Luke! I love having people here and feeling they like to come when they 're worried or tired or pleased, or anyhow——"

"And now it 's going to be overrun with schoolboys!"

"Overrun! Two boys occasionally for an afternoon to play with the children."

"Well, we don't want them."

"Yes, we do. They 're very nice boys."

"How do you know? You 've never seen them."

"Their father was nice. I hardly remember him when he was here as a boy, but he came back to stay afterwards. Peter John 's a dear; ask Tom."

"And Mrs. Peter John?"

"No, I don't think she 's nice—not nice enough for him."

Luke laughed and jingled coins in his pocket.

"How like you!" he said, "What proof have you got she is n't nice?"

But Rachel merely gave a little tilt to her nose, which might, of course, mean anything.

Luke took it to mean dislike of Mrs. Effell, who was "very possibly the nicest member of the whole family!"

"Possibly, but why do you want to stick up for her?"

"Because it 's extraordinary to me the way you can condemn people offhand, without having any facts to support you."

"Condemn! Really, Luke!"

"Is n't it condemning when your mother says a woman is n't quite quite?"

"We all know what it means. It 's a gentle and lady-like way of putting it."

"Well, what does it mean?—quite quite!"

"It means—well anybody who is quite quite knows what it means, and anybody who is n't—well they generally know too!"

"Thank you! Imbuing me with a superfluity of intelligence I can hardly lay claim to."

"Luke, don't be silly, and don't start championing Mrs. Effell in this family because it won't be any good." Rachel paused a moment and then said, "That 's a funny thing——"

"What 's a funny thing?" Luke searched the air enquiringly.

"Why, her name being Effell. I believe that 's just what she is—a real 'Mrs. F. L.' How too funny!"

Luke stopped in his walk and looked at her.

"Am I very dense?" he asked, "or would you have the goodness to explain the meaning of these cryptic remarks?"

"Mrs. F. L.—Mrs. Felix Lorraine, don't you see?"

"No, I don't."

"*Vivian Grey!*"

"I think you 're mad!"

"You know *Vivian Grey* by Disraeli."

"Do you mean a book?"

"You remember Mrs. Felix Lorraine—the woman who—you know—well, we always call those sort of people the Mrs. F. L.'s of life, and I believe Peter John's wife is a real Mrs. F. L."

"Do you mean she 's really married—or what—as her name is Effell?"

"No. I do not!"

The boys, Giles and Rupert, arrived at the school and came in due course to spend a Sunday afternoon at the Park. They proved themselves very nice boys indeed, thereby "favouring" their father more than their mother in the eyes of the family Cremayne.

"The children" took a fancy to them and showed them not only their pets before tea, but—sign of immense confidence—their favourite and most secluded haunts after tea. An assault by Red Indians was arranged for the following Saturday, and a paper chase in the near future.

Rachel was pressed into the fray, but as Luke

declined to take any part at all save as a rather disgusted onlooker, she decided to sit near him and be the queen of a neighbouring state, who crowned the victors when they brought her in their trophies.

She ran in the paper chase, however, for pure fun of the thing, as also did Tom, and they both had tea in the school-room and simply loved it, and Luke, having refused an invitation to join, raged inwardly in his cottage, seeing them all go by a radiant, laughing crew, Rachel in the midst, with "those boys" hanging on to each arm, and when he called to her over the fence she did n't hear.

They were really very nice boys and showed a proper as well as a friendly spirit. Romance was also not wanting to flavour life. The General was "the King." They had heard so much of him from their father that they felt in his presence as in the presence of Majesty. They spoke of him so behind his back and always addressed him as Sir to his face. Mrs. Cremayne was "the Queen," Rachel was a princess, Tom was her knight, whom they called Sir Thomas, and Lummond was the "Grand Turk," who wanted to carry off the English Princess, but who was to be defrauded of his right by all her faithful squires and slaves.

As time went on, Rachel and her mother felt bound to own their feelings about Lummond's treasures had undergone a change.

A better pair of servants did not exist in the neighbourhood. They kept the house spotlessly

clean. They mended and valeted Luke so that he looked thoroughly well-groomed, far more important than being merely good-looking. The garden, from being a wilderness or a desert, was fast showing signs of cultivation and a general sense of orderliness prevailed throughout.

Luke was doing so well at the bar that he talked of getting married in the following spring.

Rachel's interest for the moment centred in the garden. The house arrangements, she felt, could wait till she got into it, but the garden improvements were better done at once. Waters was the most obliging of men. He considered Miss Cremayne's designs the best he had ever seen. He kept in touch with Mr. Farmer at the Nurseries and was able to obtain cuttings, plants, bulbs, seeds apparently by the simple process of asking for them.

Luke approved of everything that Waters did, and Rachel soon found it far more expedient to let her plans unfold themselves as though the product of Waters's brain, rather than as illustrations of Rachel's mind. It seemed odd that it should be so, but if it worked better, she was quite content.

Luke was getting very keen also about a London house. He wanted to find something really charming, but would not have Rachel see it until it was "ready" from roof to cellar. In vain she begged to help choose the locality at least. No, Luke liked doing it "on his own." It amused him at odd moments to dart in under boards "to let" or

"for sale" and see if that "third" room was suitable for the mass of work and papers which with his presence would probably accumulate there. Then, might she choose the papers and the paint, the carpets and the curtains? No, if she did n't mind, he wanted it all to be a great surprise when finished. He would do it quite nicely. He should n't spare any expense, she might trust him for that. In fact, if the truth were known, she would be more likely to say it was too good than not good enough when she saw it!

"But the fun, Lulu, I 'm losing all the fun of furnishing my own home. Do let me help, dear old boy! I should love it so. I simply adore house-hunting and picking up old bits of things."

"I 'm not going to have any old bits of things in my house," Luke said. "Good and strong and useful—that 's what it 's going to be."

"Not Tottenham Court Road, Lu," rather faintly.

"The house? Of course not. Oh! the furniture. I don't know. I shall see about it all right. You leave the job to me. I shall love to lead you in after the honeymoon and see you queening it round. You won't have a thing to do but just enjoy it!"

"But you are so busy, dear. You hardly have time for all that. You don't know what a worry that sort of thing can be, and it 's much more my department than yours."

"Who 's going to pay for it?"

"You are, darling, at least I suppose so."

"Very well. Who pays the piper calls the tune."

"Yes, but I 've got to live in the house much more than you, and if I don't like the tune, it will get on my nerves."

"Then it will have such a poor time there it will have to get off."

"Luke darling, be sensible! Let us both choose the house, and both furnish it together. It 's much more fun, and much more satisfactory in the end. You know, dear, that you don't know Chippendale from Sheraton, or Jacobean from Queen Anne. Do you, now?"

"I 'm not more stupid, my dear, than a great many others."

"No, of course, you 're a great deal cleverer, I know, in your own line, but your line does n't happen to be furniture or art, does it, now?"

He looked at her, lazily amused, through half-closed lids.

"It 's going to be a very nice house, with a sweet little wife for a busy man who 's not too busy to take all the trouble necessary to give her what he wants her to have."

"But not what she wants to have!" The words flew off her tongue before she had time to control them. Then she sat tight, wondering what would befall.

"A sweet little wife wants to have what her husband wants her to have, and ought to consider herself jolly lucky to get it too! So now, Madame

to be, leave it to me. Hear that? It rhymed!

Madame to be
Leave it to me—

You talk so big about Art, and you did n't even know you had a private poet of your own! Kiss me, and then we 'll settle the day."

Between this conversation and "the day" there arose a great possibility for Luke.

The Unionist member for Flittenbridge died suddenly; a new candidate had to be found. The idea occurred to Mr. Lummond that for him to stand for Parliament now would not be altogether a bad thing. If he did n't get in, it would bring his name to the front, and if he did, it would not be bad for his party to introduce new blood when their influence was slightly on the wane.

He quite understood local wire-pulling would, of course, be useful, but he likewise took the immediate step of first going round to the central office and seeing the head agent. Then he went home for the week-end and suggested his scheme to the General.

The General was taken aback for the moment. Luke as candidate? Well they certainly wanted a man—and a local man was, of course, preferred—but—could he afford it? What did Rachel say?

Rachel had not as yet had a chance of saying anything. Luke wanted first to know whether there was a likelihood of his being adopted, as if

the party had already got some one in their eye, there would be no need to say anything.

The General promised his support, repeating, "You can really afford it?"

"Well, only by putting off our wedding, I 'm afraid. I can't do both—at least, it would n't be fair to Rachel."

"Well, that she can decide when you talk it over with her."

Luke considered the possibility of "these endless discussions" as to plans, that were constantly being offered him by various people, a most wearisome nuisance, and consequently kept his own counsel, bided his time, and said nothing.

He could tell Rachel when there was something to tell. She had always wanted him to be political. Now, perhaps, she would have her wish. At present there was no need "to discuss" a position that might never arise.

Rachel, knowing not what was passing in his mind, gave vent to what was residing in her own.

Feeling that he had received a good deal of hospitality from the neighbourhood, and anxious that he should create a pleasing impression on the friends of her girlhood, she suggested that Luke should give a small party and show off his domain.

The suggestion was hardly received with rapture, though not instantaneously dismissed, as it might have been.

Luke meditated. It might not be a bad plan. He would ask a select few, just the right few under

the circumstances, to honour him by coming to tea with a poor lone bachelor, and then he could spring upon them, one of two facts: either that he was going to be married, or that he was going to stand for Parliament.

"Yes," he told Rachel, "he did n't mind very much" asking some friends, but of course he loathed any sort of entertaining. She must n't use this as a precedent, etc. And Rachel wisely thinking, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," merely laughed and started writing a list.

Luke scratched out two-thirds of the list, and in the interval of possible excitement went back to town and work.

The tea party took place on the following Saturday. The guests were delighted with everything inside and out, but most delighted of all were they to feel they were speaking to their future Member.

Not even Mr. Lummond's apparent apathy on the subject, nor his repeated assurance that he had not the ghost of a chance against such an old hand as his opponent, could make them regard him as otherwise than their "New Member," and as such he became rapidly endowed with many good qualities, such an interesting personality, such a beautiful character, that he found it almost difficult to realise the kind of person he was, and of course always had been for years.

Rachel played her part bravely.

She wore a very becoming hat and gown, and accepted the congratulations on Luke's adoption as Parliamentary candidate with a pretty modesty, suited to the future wife of a great man.

Their marriage?—No, nothing could be settled yet. This new excitement was taking up all their thoughts.—Yes, she loved canvassing.—And attending meetings?—Rather! Luke spoke so well and easily. It was the greatest fun. And then, if he did get in, how much more thrilling to marry not only a man and a lawyer, but a Member of Parliament too!

The guests laughed, nodding acquiescence, some telling her she was a "lucky girl," which, of course, she said she knew already, and such like social amenities were finally brought to a close when the last comers, Mary Winyon and Lady Frances Frayle, drove away together.

Luke stood leaning over the carriage door, listening to their final duet of admiration.

"I think it all charming! But the garden especially takes my fancy—So it does mine. I think it so cleverly done! Was n't it Rachel's idea, making that herbaceous border there? I thought so. What was it before?—A nettle bed? You don't say so? It 's a wonderful improvement! How proud you must be of her!"

"I suppose it is an improvement," Luke said absently, "but I must say personally I rather miss the nettle bed. Good-bye again."

Who loves his garden keeps his Eden.

CHAPTER XXI

LUMMOND GOES TO WESTMINSTER

To

LUKE LUMMOND, ESQ., M.P.,
HOUSE OF COMMONS,
WESTMINSTER.

RACHEL sat looking and smiling at her own caligraphy—not because there was any merit in it or peculiarity to amuse, but just for the pure pleasure of being able to address Luke in this most coveted fashion.

Everything had turned out as that young man had intended it should. Flittenbridge had had the manners to adopt him and the grace to elect him, sending him to Parliament to represent their interests. Rachel was, therefore, "peacocking" about and enjoying herself in a state of reflected glory as any woman can.

Tom was standing behind her chair as she wrote.

"Why not send it to Chambers? He 'll get it quicker."

She turned round and looked at him with an even broader smile, saying nothing.

Tom laughed. "Give it to me. I 'll post it for you. I wish I had a lady-love."

"Tom, have n't you?"

He shook his head.

She laid her hand upon his arm. "I 've always thought—at least I 've thought for a long time—that you had."

"I wonder who?"

"Perhaps I 'd better not say, if it is n't true."

"Oh, I 'd like to know."

"Beryl."

He shook his head again. "Whatever made you think that?"

"I don't know. I 've thought it a long time, and you 've seemed different too."

He stood, balancing the letter on his fingers. "How different?"

She gave a slight shrug with her shoulders. "It 's difficult to say, but one is conscious of something different."

"Better or worse? Out with it."

"Need you ask, when you know who I thought it was?"

He smiled with his tongue in his cheek.

"Then who is it, Tom? It 's somebody good!"

"How do you know that?"

"One does n't know how. One just does know, that 's all."

"But how?"

"By the effect on you."

"What sort of effect?"

"Taming."

The man flung back his head and chuckled.

"Was I such a wild beast?"

"There have been times. Every one gets like that, I suppose, at times."

"Hum!"

"Can I help?"

"No, dear, you can't. Thank you all the same. It 's a hopeless case for poor Tom."

He went out shutting the door. Rachel heard him whistle as he descended the stairs and knew it was meant to make her feel happy about him.

She was n't unhappy, but she 'd do anything for Tom—she would for any of her brothers—and she could n't bear to think that he might be in need of help and would not like to ask her.

There was somebody Tom liked, of that she had been certain for a long time, and if he wanted that somebody to be his lady-love, it was horrid of somebody not to want it too. She wondered who it could be, if it was n't Beryl. She still had doubts that it might n't be Beryl after all!

Before the day was over she knew it was n't Beryl.

Tom came in at lunch time, bringing Sir Victor Winyon with him. Mary, his wife, was ill, he said—laid up with a cold. He thought he should run over to Paris till she was better. He wanted Tom to come too.

Rachel looking up saw an expression flit over Tom's face that she did not understand. It

looked like hate, but it could not be hate, for he was a great friend of the Winyons. It passed as it came, and he said, "I can't go this week, but I could next. Why not wait and perhaps she could come too?"

Sir Victor said, "This week, or not at all, for me. We can go over Friday and back Sunday night."

Tom said, "Sorry then," and Rachel offered to go and see Mary.

Lady Winyon was delighted to see her visitor, in spite of that visitor's crude observation she had come to "try and do her good."

They sat and talked platitudes and politics, and Rachel was conscious all the time that something was hiding in the background. Captain Adams and his sister came under discussion, but they failed to interest Mary, until Rachel said something about a future sister-in-law. She saw Mary's eyes suddenly widen; she hurried on to speak in a general way of their different friends and of how few one would wish to have in such close connection. She knew her voice faltered; she knew she was into a conversation she could not get out of and yet would like to; she knew that something had got between her and Mary, that each was sitting tentatively watching, and hoping the other did not see—what?

The conversation drifted away from sisters-in-law, and as they talked of other things, Rachel knew they were both equally resolved to turn their backs on Tom.

He himself defeated this resolve, for as Rachel stood up to go, some flowers from a florist were brought in by a servant.

Lady Winyon unpinned the paper and found a card.

She was a very poor actress. She said, "Oh, how nice of him," with a would-be nonchalant air which could not deceive any one over seven, and gave Rachel the pasteboard. There was nothing printed on it, no name at all. It was a blank card with only some scribbled initials "To M. M. M."

Rachel acting equally poorly said, "Is it Tom? How pretty of him, my dear! What can have taken him? Shall I stick them into water as they are for to-night? You won't want the bother of doing them."

On her way home Rachel pondered and pondered. The difficulties, the complexities of life were not reserved for her. There were others she loved in the thick of the battle, but she felt so sure of them both—so delightfully, so elatingly sure—and yet so, so sorry.

Soon after she got back, Lummond came to see her in answer to her note.

She had written to him, in that first letter addressed to the House, many pretty things about himself, about his career, about his future—not a word about their marriage—that, she felt, must come from him. She also said she saw in him a second "Endymion," and he came round to laugh with her at the idea.

After some lovemaking he reverted to this. His recollections of the gentleman mentioned were somewhat hazy, but he was quite ready to see a parallel if she could show him one. She reminded him of the difficulties in Ferrar's early life—the loss of wealth, the loss of parents, the hardships of his youth, a clerkship in a second-rate Government Office; then of his lift into the political world and of his success there, as a friend, as a brother, as—she broke off momentarily and added—"in every walk of life he seemed to succeed, though at first everything was against him."

Lummond said: "That certainly sounds like me, but I don't think I have the same chance of success."

Rachel said: "But you have! That is just what I want you to see. You really have more chance. It seems to me you have got everything in the hollow of your hand to do with as you please. You have come out of lots of difficulties, I know, and now you are doing well at the bar. Every one says so—not only to me; I hear it all round, and you 've got into Parliament, and you 've got a gift of the gab which will make you of use to your party, so that you 'll soon be spoken of as 'our brilliant Member for Flittenbridge'!"

"Dear little woman, you always believe my destiny to be something great, but I don't know that you are right. There 's always the beastly fact at the back of everything that I was kicked out of the army."

"Sh—you are never to mention that, never to think of it. It was another you, not the real you, that it happened to, and the best way to prevent other people from remembering it is for you never to remember it either. The real you is the man I shall be so proud some day to marry."

He kissed her. "I feel such a pig in not saying we 'll be married at once. It makes me seem to stand in a wrong light; but you know how things are, you decided we should wait, did n't you?"

"Yes, I decided."

"You know it 's really best, though it 's horrid for both of us, of course." Still it would be suicidal at the present moment for me to think of marriage."

"Would it, my dear?"

"Suicidal. I think I can just get along as I 'm doing now—being very careful. By the way, you said you knew of some rooms for me that you thought might suit. What are they and where?"

"A bedroom and sitting-room in—don't laugh and despise it—in Warwick Street!"

"Pimlico!"

"You need n't say it in that tone of voice. Plenty of nice people live in Pimlico. Endymion lived there—in Warwick Street, and directly I heard the address, I thought of him—and you. Will you look at them?"

He shook his head.

"Well, they 've just been vacated by Mr. Dashlin, who 's got an under-secretaryship, and

if they were good enough for him for five years, I thought——"

"You thought wrong then. Poor I may be, but I need n't descend into that abyss."

"I tell you, Endymion lived there. Do read *Endymion* again, darling, and refresh your memory with the way he got on. He had lots of difficulties and he got over them so well. He took himself in hand and——"

"Yes—sort of man would if he lived in Pimlico. Anything else to suggest?"

"No. Only it 's very inexpensive, Lu, and it is n't far from the House, and I thought if you could put up with the locality for a little time, perhaps——"

"Perhaps what?"

"You know."

"I don't, darling. I don't know a bit what you 're driving at. What do you think would happen if I haunted the purlieus of Pimlico for a little time? Tell me——"

You will succeed; for everything in this world depends upon will.

"I think everything in this world depends upon woman," said Endymion.

"It is the same thing," said Berengaria.

Lord Beaconsfield.

CHAPTER XXII

THE NEW MEMBER

WORK was very brisk in Haskell's Chambers. Solicitors' clerks simply haunted that doorway, flurried and important, armed with documents for the important K. C. or for the almost equally important junior M. P.

In this flourishing condition of things Luke prospered and grew fat, but he did n't save money. He had a delightful time, really busy at the bar and not wholly idle in Parliament.

His position in the House was gradually getting defined. He could be counted upon not so much to make speeches as to speak when others older than himself and more versed in diplomacy preferred to keep silence, shirking the onus perhaps of a bit of straight talking to some honoured member of the Opposition.

Luke never shirked getting on his feet. He would spring up, leaning his body forward, hands on hips, eyes darting right and left, tongue wagging unrestrained, and give vent to his opinions with a choice virility of language that caused cackles of laughter from both sides of the House.

He was not at this time living in Warwick Street. He had taken rooms at the Albany, and rather fancied himself as a dog about town or one who would like to be.

He went very little into society and hardly dined out at all. He was too tired at the end of the day to go through that performance known as "making himself pleasant," so preferred to dine at his club or with the Cremaynes, where, as he himself said, he could at least afford to be natural.

He told Rachel of his performances in the Courts and in the House, and helped her glean the tit-bits about himself from the daily and weekly papers. It was great fun and difficult to say which enjoyed this time the most, the man who worked or the woman who praised. Both were fulfilling their functions, and harmony reigned. But there was no talk of marriage.

Luke himself steered clear of this. What he felt was that until everything was in order for a *ménage à deux*, it was better to say nothing. It only made them both miserable to talk about what could not be, and no good was done in regretting to each other that at present, "it could not be." It was a fact, and as such was accepted in the ground-floor room of his mind.

Rachel, of course, carried the thing straight up into the attic and made a picture of it under the skylight.

It was only a water-colour, but the figures were

clear and distinct. As she was learning her values, her sense of proportion increased.

Luke did not see the pictures and he thereby missed a pleasure, and what might have been a useful source of information to him, if he 'd had eyes to see.

Amongst all the satisfactions of his calling Luke found there also lurked other things labelled with hard and ugly titles, such as responsibility, duty, dignity, things he never had had any fancy for, and never supposed he would have. They were tiresome, ridiculous things the world could well do without, and now, just when he really was getting his head up, they came bump up against him and stood in his way with horrid, dissentient voices he could not bear.

The worst aspect of this irritating state of affairs was that he was reminded more often of the disagreeable things of life by Rachel than by anybody else. It was Rachel who told him when some of his constituents were in town and of their desire to see him in the House if they did not hear him. It was Rachel who forwarded him little notes written to her, asking whether some friend from Flittenbridge might hope for tea on the Terrace any afternoon that week—Rachel who passed on suggestions from Mrs. This or Lady That, implying he had either done or left undone goodness knows what, but some trifling omission or commission, the remembrance of which apparently was not to rankle unnoticed and unknown. Rachel,

in fact and in plain English, was ruffling the waters in which he wanted to sail his little boat and which but for Rachel he would so thoroughly enjoy doing.

Luke wanted to be M. P., but he did not want to give people tea on the Terrace. He wanted to be elected for his own borough, but he did not want to see his constituents in town. He had seen quite enough of them at election time. He did not care a hang what Mrs. This or Lady That thought of him or his manners. They were his own manners, and if anybody did not like them, they could lump them. It was perfectly simple. He did not want people to like him. He would much rather they did n't like him. Then, perhaps, they would leave him alone.

The only thing he did want was that Rachel should be pleased with him as he was, not as she thought he might be; that she should understand him better and keep from him all the horrid, little worries that seemed to spring up in his path at every fresh step he took. She might smooth those away for him; in fact, if she loved him, she would— All of which did not make life very easy for the woman who had linked her interests with his.

He had no idea the worries were of his own making, not hers nor anyone's; no conception that he was possessed of a mania for raising obstacles along the road they travelled which prevented the smooth running of any wheel, no matter how well-

oiled. No sense of humour helped him to see kindly advice as anything but "a piece of unwarrantable interference." No imagination showed him hints and suggestions for his success in the future. He regarded them as so many attempts to put him under a rule of thumb. From his point of view any private request for his help or his opinion was simply "concerted action" on the part of everybody to "do him" in some way or another, and any effort by Rachel to show him he was mistaken was at once construed into a "regular combine" against him, in which he now regarded her as the chief offender.

And added to all these difficulties with Luke was the difficulty that really assailed Rachel from within, the difficulty of her own temperament—that ardent, passionate temperament, though kept in due control, that longed to share all the pleasures of a strong, creative instinct, combined with those flights of fancy, those happy inspirations, due to an enlightened understanding when illumined from above—and these Lummond refused to share.

She would pour them out upon him, smothering him, as it were, with her ideas of "the mutual help and comfort that the one ought to have of the other;" and he would rise up, pushing and floundering because these things bothered him so.

This was what troubled Rachel. Whether to pursue her own line of education for herself—the education that was to fit her to be the wife of a man who was going to make a mark in the world

and who would be glad some day that she had had the foresight to see further then he did, and the forethought to prepare for a day in the distance that would disclose his destiny and hers—or whether to be content just to please him in the whim of the moment.

This was the difficulty she was able to discuss with Ruth.

And yet, strange to say, as a result of this discussion, it was not Ruth that sent her away light-hearted and rejoicing—it was Ruth's husband.

He had come in one day when they were together, and his entrance had broken no threads off short. On the contrary, he had sat down and taken them up and woven the pattern into a triangle.

"Could men help women more than women help men?" That was what they discussed, and Robert divided the planes on which they could help, and receive help the one from the other—the spiritual plane where the woman ruled from the material plane where the man ruled.

And they talked without fear or favour till Rachel had to leave, and Robert saw her downstairs, still talking, and when they reached the door, he put his hand on the catch but did not turn it, for Rachel was saying, "It 's all right for oneself, when one knows what to do, but what is anybody to do who does n't know—and perhaps does n't want to know?"

Mr. Haskell flattened his shoulders against the

closed door, his hand still on the catch. He threw up his head, not looking at Rachel.

"Surely," he said, "somebody asked that very same question long ago. You know your Bible, I expect, better than I do, but surely a disciple once said, 'Lord, and what shall this man do?' And the answer was very simple, 'What is that to thee? Follow thou me.'"

"Oh!"

It was like a breath of pure air.

Standing on the door-mat Rachel looked at him, her soul shining through her eyes.

"I can't thank you for that. It 's too—perfectly beautiful. Good-bye, Mr. Haskell."

"Good-bye, *Mademoiselle.*"

Vainly you hedge him from the assault of harm
Who bears the seed of ruin in himself.

Merope.

CHAPTER XXIII

MEETS MRS. EFFELL

THOSE nice boys, Rupert and Giles Effell, came over to see the Cremaynes one half-holiday at the end of term with a piece of news in their pockets they were bursting to share with their friends.

"Mother 's coming to England and bringing Baby with her!" They shouted this to "the children" directly they came in sight. They hurled it at Rachel and Luke down the length of the moss walk. They panted after the General and stood at attention, waiting for his customary inquiry, "Heard from your father lately?"

"Yes, Sir," still waiting breathless for "the King" to ask,

"And what does he say?"

Then both the voices answered,

"Mother 's coming to England, and going to bring Baby with her!"

"That 's good news, that 's good news, little lads, is n't it? We must celebrate news like that. I wonder what we can find."

Here the General felt in his pockets and found a half-crown and a florin.

"No favouritism," he said. "You must toss for these." And a moment later the boys' eyes shone as they sped away to the house and told a friend in the kitchen and more friends in the pantry and finally crept to Mrs. Cremayne and whispered into her ear.

"Mother 's coming to England, Ma'am, and bringing Baby with her, and we 've never seen Baby, you know, Ma'am." They were anxiously training to speak to a real queen some day, when they should be real soldier men.

Mrs. Cremayne said she was very glad and kissed her subjects' rather heated faces and was sorry that their father was n't coming too.

This regret had not struck the boys, but they then both agreed it was a great pity, and they would write at once suggesting he should do so. After that the gardens, the stables, the dairy, and in fact every place that kept a human being on it echoed to the words—

"I say! Mother 's coming to England and bringing Baby with her, but you know—" with gravely serious nods, "it 's a pity Father is n't coming too!"

"And now I suppose we shall be having Mrs. Effell and a nurse and a baby planted here shortly," quoth Master Luke, in the course of avoiding collision with the noisy crew. "I must

say I 'm rather curious to see the lady that is n't quite quite!"

"Well, your curiosity seems likely to be gratified," said Rachel quietly.

Something in her voice, some unfamiliar half-tone claimed the man's attention.

"What is it?" he said. "Are n't you well?"

She said "Yes," but he was not content and took her into a spidery summer-house and made her sit down.

"Is it my fault? Darling, have I said or done something you don't like?"

Suddenly she gave a great sob, and turning to him, put her head on his shoulder.

He kept saying, "Darling, what is it? what is it?" but she could not answer.

"Oh, Rachel, what is the matter? What have I done? What has upset you, darling?"

"Nothing."

Luke's face wrinkled with agitation, and he besought her to tell him the cause of such grief.

"It is n't any—thing. It 's only silliness."

"But you don't cry for nothing," said the man, though he remarked this did not lessen the sobs. "Was it those beastly children shouting about the place?"

She shook her head.

"It could n't have been what I said about Mrs. Effell—you don't know Mrs. Effell."

But this time she did not shake her head.

"Rachel, was it what I said? I know I 'm a crusty old bird."

"No, not really."

"How do you mean 'not really'?"

"It was—the way you said it. You don't mean it, I know, but I can't bear it. When I hear that edge in your voice, it sounds—brutal."

"Darling!"

"You don't mean it, I know, but it nearly kills me."

"About a beastly woman we 've neither of us ever seen!"

"I know it 's silly."

"It is n't like you. You 're generally so sensible——"

"Not about you. I 'm never sensible about you. I never have been. I hope I never shall be."

"Rachel, darling, you must be ill."

But she cried on quietly.

"What made you suddenly feel like this?"

"It is n't sudden. I 've felt it for ages."

"Felt what?"

"As if something awful were going to happen. I can't explain——"

"I wish you could," said the man. "It 's awful to cry about nothing."

"It 's the worst kind of cry there is. If I could explain, I probably should n't cry."

"But what do you think is going to happen?"

"I don't know."

"Then suppose you wait till it does happen."

"It 'll be too late then."

"Too late for what?"

"Too late to matter. Oh, Lu, tell me I 'm a fool!"

"You 're a darling! rather a foolish darling. I wish I were more deserving of you."

"Oh, Lu, kiss me, and tell me there 's nothing to be afraid of."

"Nothing whatever—except that I shan't make enough money to marry you as quickly as I should like."

"How quickly would you like?"

"To-morrow."

"Kiss me again, and hug me harder than you 've ever hugged me before."

This was the first outward sign of the gradual breaking-down of that strength of will which had kept Rachel going for so long. She felt she had never loved Lummond so well as when he had comforted her in that spidery abode, and when he bid good-night, whispering cheerily, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," in the light of wisdom so very wise she gladly saw herself for a fool.

This first sign was quickly followed by others, and at last Rachel was banished to her room by doctor's orders and told she would have to stay there for some little time.

Rachel fought against the advice, vowing there

was nothing the matter, though admitting at the same time she had lost her self-control, and could not stop crying, though she knew she had nothing to cry for.

After fighting a futile fight, she gave in with a good grace, and the tired and exhausted nerves were fed and rested and strengthened, chiefly with simple things such as fresh air and love and sunshine and quiet.

And Luke was nearly demented. He might n't see her; he might n't write to her; he might n't hear from her; and he never had had so much to say in his life as now when he could n't say it. He would come down every week, hoping the end of banishment had come, he would walk round under her windows and call so loud in his heart he felt she must hear him and come and look out.

"How long, how long is this to go on," he would say impatiently to all the family in turn, and they cheered him up with promises of "perhaps next week you shall see her!" "Perhaps," it was always "perhaps."

And one week he did n't come. He wrote instead to Mrs. Cremayne and said that he and Sir Victor Winyon had both paired and were going over to Paris together. He did not want to go, but he was so wretched he felt he must have a change of ideas to keep him up to his work.

And after he came back he was allowed to see Rachel.

It was the following Sunday afternoon and she

was still upstairs, though much better and brighter. She was surrounded with flowers, and while the nurse came in and out from the adjoining room, Rachel looked at her Lares and Penates with eyes that tried to see them for the first time as Luke's eyes would see them.

What would attract him most? Would it be the general sense of colour and comfort, or the individual beauty of some of her favourite pictures? Would he see that old sampler on the wall and want to know the history of it? Would he notice her row of Ruskins and remark on the lovely binding? Would her china cottages arrest his attention, or would he prefer the spotty dogs?

Luke came swiftly in, and the room might have been bare. He ignored the arm-chair set out for him, and knelt on the floor by her side, and though he complained she was pale, he kissed her till she bloomed again.

He told her about Paris, and how much he had enjoyed his visit, and what a superior city it was to London in every way, and then they had tea together, and during tea he said he had made up his mind they must marry at once. He had n't any money, but they could jog along somehow. When did she think it could be? And they talked till the nurse gave warning that time was up. Rachel held his hand as he stood beside her with his eyes fixed on something beyond.

"What are you looking at?" she said, believing it was the Bartolozzi.

"Why, that old photo of me. I always think it the best that was ever done." He walked away without kissing her, over to the table and stooped over the frame. "I believe it 's like me still, don't you? I don't alter much, do I? Well, good-bye, old girl; get well soon."

The next words that opened Rachel's tear-drenched eyes were said in the breathy whisper of a very young voice.

"What did he bring you from Paris? Tell me, 'cause we all want to know."

It was not thought very wise to repeat this experiment of a visit from Lummond, for after it Rachel had a relapse and only when she recovered, was she allowed to see anyone at all, and then she asked for the Bishop.

What they said to each other is best known to themselves. They disagreed entirely on a main point, but, as the Bishop allowed she might be right and he might be wrong, he promised to stand by her and support her if she needed support, though at the same time he would wish to be sure she was in no such need at all.

"Give me a tonic, Gruff, before you go, and thank you a thousand times for coming. I want to do what is right, but it 's difficult to be certain when the people you love best don't think you are right at all, is n't it?"

The Bishop scribbled on the back of an old envelope that lay beside her.

"Good-bye, child," he said. "Send for me any time you want me. I 'll always come. God bless you!"

She watched him go, then looked at his prescription and smiled.

"*2 Tim.* 1.7. to be applied daily."

For God hath not given us the spirit of Fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

CHAPTER XXIV

LADY MOYNE MEETS ROBERT HASKELL

LUKE Lummond had seen the lady who was n't "quite quite," but he did not tell Rachel because, he said, he did not think it would interest her.

They had met in Paris where she was buying clothes, and he was being ciceronèd round by Sir Victor Winyon.

The latter admired her. Staying in the same hotel and being an adept in making himself pleasant to pretty and lonely ladies, it had not been difficult for Lummond also to get into focus by a judicious mention of the names Giles and Rupert. The likeness was so strong, he assured her that he knew she was Mrs. Effell before ever he looked in the book.

Mrs. Effel declined to be flattered outwardly, though inwardly in a flutter—the slightest attention of two English "statesmen" (!) being a gratifying contrast to the company of Indian civilians in a Hill station.

They crossed by the same boat and travelled in

the same train, though only Luke chose the same carriage. Sir Victor went "smoking."

When they finally parted company, Luke thought Mrs. Effell bewitching, and considered Sir Victor rather a "cad." Strange that a man of his birth and position should be a cad, but he really found this was so, seeing that Sir Victor had no idea of befriending their mutual acquaintance once they were all on the other side of the Channel.

When Mrs. Effell expressed the hope of meeting again and continuing their pleasant intercourse, Luke grinned, boyishly ready to fall in with any such plan, Sir Victor was absorbed with a paper and its Parliamentary news. When Luke mentioned Mrs. Effell's hopeful attitude towards them both, Sir Victor merely said, "My dear fellow, one does many things abroad that one does n't do at home." And then it was Luke saw this man of the world as a cad.

He also saw it was rather nice for him having Mrs. Effell in town just when Rachel was ill. It was most annoying she should be ill, and that he should not be able to see her, but that was n't his fault, and feeling rather stranded and lonely, he volunteered to do for Mrs. Effell in London what Sir Victor had done for him in Paris. The two boys had been had up for a Saturday and Sunday to see their mother and be introduced to the new addition to the family. They also brought many pretty messages to her from the Cremaynes, which had been preceded by a letter containing an invita-

tion to come and stay, and give them all the pleasure of seeing the wife of their dear friend whom they still called "Peter John."

Mr. Lummond was very useful these two days, and Giles and Rupert confided to Mrs. Effell that, though they did not care about him at Flittenbridge, here he was very jolly. They told Mrs. Effell all she wanted to know about the family, more especially about Rachel, who was evidently chief favourite, and the boys longed to see their mother in the place and with the people who spelled Happiness for them with such a large H in these their young school-days.

Mrs. Effell promised to come and bring Humphrey. "He must n't be called Baby any longer, the other fellows would think it so silly." And she would wait for their princess's return, if they made such a point of it—only Mr. Lummond must come too, or she would feel so shy.

Rupert said, "You won't feel shy when you see them. They 're just awfully jolly, are n't they, Giles?"

"Mothers are never shy," said Giles. "They 're always right."

And Lummond's letter to Rachel, mentioning "the extraordinary coincidence" of his acquaintance with "Peter John's wife" and his following it up in town because, and only because, it was so deadly to go down home when she was not there, arrived at the Winyons, where she was recruiting, only one post before the exciting epistle penned

by her turbulent knights after their visit to town.

It said a great deal for Rachel's recuperative powers that she took the announcement calmly. It was an extraordinary coincidence Luke meeting the lady in question, so extraordinary that it made it all the more extraordinary, and certainly not a coincidence, that he had n't mentioned it to her the day he came to see her after his return from Paris. Still she would not worry—of that she was quite determined. The prescription had begun to work.

She wrote back chaffing Luke about his secrecy, and hoped that he found the lady "quite, quite" to his taste, and deserving of all the chivalry he had shewn in standing up for the unknown and the absent! For herself she was having a splendid time. The Winyons were expecting a big party next week, and, as she was so much better, she had promised to stay on through it. Perhaps Mr. Haskell was coming for the week-end, but of course it was only perhaps, and she wished so much he, Luke, could come too, but she was afraid he had made Mary think he would never stay away, as she had not suggested asking him.

There was a postscript.

"Sir Victor says Mrs. Effell is bloomingly bountifully beautiful and you may give her his love and a kiss!!!"

Luke was furious. He did not think it the least funny but just what you would expect from a common cad. He tried in every way to make up

to Mrs. Effell for the backsliding of her other admirer. He was so nice that Mrs. Effell found it difficult not to draw a comparison between the two men. She almost admitted to him in words that she considered him distinctly the superior of the two.

She went down to Flittenbridge for two days but did not take the baby with her, and in spite of much kindness, in spite of the boys' pleasure in shewing her off, in spite of Mr. Lummond's company, she sighed a sigh of great relief when she found herself outside the gates. She confided to Luke that the atmosphere was not what she was accustomed to. It was rather rarefied. She quite admitted that she could breathe better on a lower plane. She would have to become acclimatised before she could feel easy in the society of either the General or Mrs. Cremayne. And Luke laughed and admitted he knew how she felt, and this feeling made a bond of sympathy bind them a bit tighter in their acquaintance.

And Rachel stayed on for her week, and "perhaps" gave way to certainty when Mr. Haskell came down on the Friday night in time for dinner.

And amongst the people already in the house was a perfect pet of a woman, little Lady Moyne. Very pretty, very dainty, very *chic*, and bearing the word "minx" in every tone of her voice, every turn of her head, every glint of her wicked and mischievous eye.

She really was a darling, no two words about it.

The whole house thought so—the smoking-room perhaps the most of all, but she was very careful, very circumspect in her manner, very open in her flirtations, "obliged to be rather a prude because you see Alfred's abroad—Alfred's my husband, you know."

And yet Lady Moyne admitted to the rest of the women that at present she was living but for one thing, and one thing only—that one was to meet Mr. Haskell. She, Molly Moyne, wished to stand on a stool and look at that K.C., M.P. man, face to face, and eye to eye, that she might see for herself what there was that made everybody talk about him and love him in this utterly ridiculous and exaggerated fashion.

She was told he paid no attention to women, and she could n't believe it. She had never met a man yet who had n't attended to her if she wished him to. She knew he was very nice to them, of course, but that was different from what she meant. She knew he would be nice to her, but she would not be satisfied with just ordinary niceness because "you see I knew him before, when I was young."

"When you were what?" Mary said politely.

"When I was young, dear, many years ago. I knew him when I was so high," indicating a few inches from the floor, "and he was a great big schoolboy and we played on 'the sands of Dee'; so now, I think," surveying the company with the sweetest smile in the world, "when he does come, you 'll allow I have a prior claim to most of you!"

Rachel was infinitely amused and wrote a long account of her charms to Luke, wishing so much he were there. He would certainly have his head turned "backsyfore," but she would not mind a bit. It would be quite an education for him or any man to be taken in hand by Molly Moyne.

And then, when Robert Haskell arrived, it was still more amusing. He was very courteous, very kind, very delightful to everyone, but he had far more to say to Lady Winyon and Rachel Cremayne than he had to his "former playmate."

It was not till tea-time on Saturday that Lady Moyne faintly suggested a moment of triumph apart from the rest of the world, and then she did sit "twinkling" till Rachel went round to her chair and insisted on knowing the cause.

Lady Moyne pointed to the hem of her gown lying on the floor.

"It 's torn," she said, "just a little bit ripped, and it 's been mended with a safety pin. Don't touch it, woman! It 's going down to posterity. Years hence it will be seen in the British Museum, ticketed. This pin was put into this rag by Robert Haskell, Abcdefg—down to z. Early 20th century."

"How did it happen?"

"Up on the landing. He carelessly stood an ordinary, common boot upon it, but as his precious foot was inside, the fragile, fairy fabric like its owner collapsed. Then he mended it and we sat on the stairs, because it took him so long to finish

being sorry. I intend to ask Mary to glass the place over."

"I suppose you know he has a wife."

"Don't speak to me of her. It 's one of the things I try to forget. Would any of the others care to come and look at the pin, do you think? He took it out of his tie—not the one at the top, but the little tin darling that fastens it down here, near his heart. No one has seen it but me, and now you, because I trust you."

Lady Moyne apparently trusted most people, for by dinner-time they all knew "that silly Molly was never going to have her dress mended because it had been torn by Mr. Haskell."

"Does n't it make them wild," she whispered to Rachel, "to find I 've got something to flaunt in their faces for ever?"

Before dinner was over Robert felt as if ten years had slipped away from his life. "That child" had taken him right out of himself and his daily rut of legal-political affairs.

She saw him not as the rest of the world saw him, a busy and occupied man to whom serious people came for his opinion or advice. She saw him as a friend and a playmate with whom she could talk on equal terms because he 'd been nice to her as a schoolboy when she was only a baby.

And after dinner he was a schoolboy again. Why not? He placed himself unreservedly in Molly's hands and her orders were that he was to dance. It was in vain he protested that a card

game was more suitable for people of his age. There would be no cards, and he was to dance with every woman in turn, beginning with Lady Winyon. Robert bowed, but did not move. His instructress was standing close to him and as he looked down on her pretty head, something rose up in his mortal mind that was reminiscent of youth and fun and a little devil, maybe.

"Well, are n't you going to ask your hostess? There, you 're too late! Try Miss Cremayne—no, you 've lost her now. If you are n't quick, you won't get anyone. Who would you like—best?"

She got no answer, and only a slight flicker of her eyelids showed she was conscious of silent pleasure in just standing there, tempting.

Presently, having bent her head lower to examine minutely the pattern on her fan, she raised her eyes and looked at him.

A pair of twin devils greeted Robert's one, and with a sound rather like "clk" at the back of his throat, the man became a schoolboy.

Rachel had never seen him as he was that evening. No one had ever seen him, mad as a March Hare and a Hatter—absolutely, ridiculously, delightfully mad and young.

Molly was prettily elated at her success, and the laughing congratulations of the rest of her sex, as they went up-stairs, proved her the "Perfect Pet" they had all declared her to be.

After the frolic was over Robert sat on talking with Sir Victor until most good-nights had been

said. Then he, too, went up to fetch some papers, intending, now all was quiet, to return and read them for at least an hour or more.

He opened his door, or what he thought was his door, and saw he had made a mistake. "I beg your pardon," he said, instinctively shutting out the momentary surprise. He turned uncertainly, to make sure of his bearings, heard a faint, high-sweet "cuckoo!" and hesitated.

Colonel Varley, coming up to bed a moment later, cannoned against someone descending the stairs.

"Hullo Haskell! You look as if you 'd seen a ghost."

Robert passed on down to the now deserted library. He stood deliberately meditating, then he slowly lit a pipe, and sat down at the table mechanically, as if to work.

Something danced in his brain. He leaned back and thought of the training of years and the little disciplines of life, and wondered and wondered whether he were a wise man or a fool.

If thou do ill the joy fades, not the pains;
If well, the pain doth fade, the joy remains.

George Herbert.

CHAPTER XXV

WIRELESS TELEGRAPHY

MRS. HASKELL'S nurse was roused early on Sunday morning by the unwonted sound of a call from Ruth. She responded to it by coming into the room and finding the invalid sitting up with shining eyes and a bright patch of colour on either cheek.

"I can move my feet!"

The woman stood a moment stock still, a hairbrush in her hand.

"Look!" There was a slight movement under the quilt near the end of the bed. The nurse dropped the brush and sprang forward, turning back the clothes.

It was true!

Ruth moved them to the right and to the left. There was no stiffness at the ankles. She twisted them easily, using the heel as a pivot. She looked at the nurse, and both women burst into tears in the midst of a sobbing laugh.

"I can't believe it! I can't believe it!" After so many years to find her heart's desire assuming

a possibility of fulfilment signified the upheaval of all present conditions and indicated future ones that dazzled her to think of.

They sent a message to Sir James Bagot, who was out of town, and Ruth spent the day longing for Robert's return, but would not telegraph to him. It was so seldom he could be prevailed on to leave her, and a few days in the country would do him so much good.

He would come back Monday morning in time for his work. He might come to the house; he might go straight to the Temple. She would write to ensure his doing the former, and she lay picturing his surprise when he heard the news. Then—no, she would not write. She would leave him free to do just what he naturally would do. He might have a very important case on. He might only have time to drop his luggage and go on to the Courts—not time to enjoy the excitement of such stirring information. But if she said it once, she must have said it a dozen times that day, "Robert, darling, I wish you 'd come."

She went out in her chair and sat in the park and thought the world more lovely than ever before. She watched the ducks fighting in the water; she saw the fig-tree at the corner by the bridge was covered with fruit; she noticed the Royal Standard flying from the Palace on her left; and she thought Westminster on her right had never looked so beautiful as it looked in the sunlight to-day.

"And soon—very soon, perhaps—I shall be walking here," she said to herself. "Walking! Thank God! I thank God!" was her chorus to every thought that was making life so fair and gave to her face so radiant a smile.

People came to see her in the afternoon, but she did not tell them her news. She kept it snug inside till Robert should know.

More than six years, it was nearly seven years, since she was paralysed, and yet no shadow of a fear crossed her brain that when he knew, he might not care.

Towards evening she was musing and thinking and listening to the songs of the birds, happy in anticipating greater happiness, playing with it as it were to-day, because it would really come to-morrow, when she heard a cab drive up and sounds in the hall below that meant no visitor, but the master of the house.

Robert came softly up the stairs, and put his head just round the door, smiling with his eyes.

"Well!"

Something in hers fetched him quickly to her side. He kissed her, held her face between his hands, and said quietly, "What is it?"

She said equally quietly, "What made you come back to-day?"

"You!"

She shook her head as well as she could.

He nodded. "Yes, I heard you call. I knew you wanted me. What is it?"

Then she watched the man's face as she told him.

The little signs and crinkles of pleasure came out at her words and gave him almost a boyish look. Supposing he had n't cared, just supposing he had n't cared!

Well he did care—so there 's no need to suppose—and he let her know he cared, and she also knew she had n't exaggerated the joy and charm of telling him she was going to be made whole, for Robert could n't have been gladder—he could n't have seemed gladder.

"I 've always known," he said, "always known I should one day come back from my work to find you walking to meet me. It 's so strong that I never come into the house without glancing up to the landing to see if it is n't the day, to see that you are n't looking at me over the stairs, and I shall come thundering up to catch you like this in case you fall down in your excitement!"

"Archangel and Seraph!"

Later they dined together quietly and talked of his visit and of the people he had met. He asked if she remembered the child Molly he had spoken of as marrying Lord Moyne a year or two ago; said she was there without her husband, who was abroad, and described her as "most fascinating; but I wish she knew you or somebody like you to befriend her."

Ruth only heard with her outward ears. She was inwardly listening to an inner voice questioning and presently she said,—

"Now I 've told you something you 've often wanted to hear, will you tell me something I have waited for years and years to know? It 's quite a little thing, but who was the man you met long ago, the other side of Westminster Bridge, that night you stayed out so late and walked up and down; do you remember? Will you tell me now who he was, and what he said, and why you would not tell me before?"

Robert sat back, his eyes twinkling. "Yes," he said, "I will." Then he paused, "Funny you should ask me that to-day. You shall decide whether he really exists or whether he is only a myth. I met that night on the bridge 'the man I would like to be,' and he came and spoke to 'the man that I was' and gave him some jolly good advice. I did n't tell you before because I thought he might be a fraud; see?"

Ruth took his hand and held it against her face. "He is n't a fraud," she said softly. "He 's my very greatest friend and has been for years. *Mein guter Geist! Mein besseres Ich!*"

. . . . . .

The Winyons' visitors had all got the fidgets—a Sunday complaint that often attacks a company as well as individuals. They strolled about the garden; they rested in chairs and hammocks; they knocked a few balls about; they played with Miss Winyon; but a sense of dissatisfaction steadily prevailed.

Where was Mr. Haskell? That was what everybody wanted to know, and nobody liked to ask.

Lady Moyne presently gave tongue.

"I say, has Mr. Haskell gone away for good?"

Nobody answered, because nobody knew.

She looked round the company, missing Rachel.

"Where 's Miss Cremayne," she said sharply.

The rest shook their heads.

"Don't know? Perhaps they 've eloped!"

"Very likely."

"He walked back from church with her. Perhaps they arranged it then!"

"Perhaps."

"He is devout, is n't he? I watched him out of the tail of my eye. Knows all the tricks, does n't he?"

"Oh, Lady Moyne, and I hope I and thought and flattered myself that you——"

"Well, I was n't!" she said, "but you may come now for a walk and see if we can find those hypocrites."

They found Rachel near the house, and Lady Moyne took her arm, shaking off her quondam cavalier.

"Now, answer me, woman, has Mr. Haskell gone away?"

"Yes."

"For good?"

"I expect so."

"Where?"

"Home."

"Back to his wife?"

"Yes."

"Coward! What 's she like?"

"His wife? Charming."

"She is n't paralysed?"

"She is."

"Not really paralysed?"

"Yes, really—her body I mean, not her heart or her head."

"Oh rot!" said Lady Moyne. "What made him go to-day?"

"Because she wanted him."

"How did he know? There 's no post. Did he get a wire?"

"No—at least I suppose you might call it wireless telegraphy if you like."

Lady Moyne shook the arm she held. "Why should he tell you?"

"He did n't. He told Mary and they motored him to Bortown for the four o'clock."

"Poor, timid thing, he was afraid of me!"

"I don't think so. You might blind his eyes temporarily, but you 'd never make his ears dull of hearing."

"Hearing what?" Remembering he was deaf to her "cuckoo."

Rachel shook her head.

"Hearing what? I insist on knowing."

But Rachel only smiled in silence.

"It 's all very spiritual, I suppose, and beautiful."

"Yes."

Molly's laugh had a ring of hardness. "Don't you believe it! A man like that—spiritual! I know the sort."

"Do you?" Rachel said. "They 're a nice sort, but rare."

"Thank the Lord! When these d——d spiritualists get hold of a man, there 's no chance for a really nice woman like me."

Silence.

"Is there now? Perhaps you don't know, but I 've never been taught that sort of thing. It 's all a foreign language to me. I 've got a thoroughly healthy mind and a thoroughly healthy body, and I 've been trained to understand that a woman's chief aim in life is to be attractive." She slipped round and faced Rachel. "Do you think I succeed?"

"You don't want me to tell you that."

"I do want you. That 's just what I do want. It 's people like you that matter. It 's no compliment to hear twice that from some people; it 's an enormous compliment from others."

"Flatterer!"

"No, I appeal for the moment to your intellect, your reason, your calmest and coldest judgment. Do you consider that as a woman—*femme, pure et simple*—I am attractive?"

"Yes."

"Do you consider that if I had a spark of spirituality in my little pagan composition, I should be more attractive, and to a larger audience

—that I should appeal more strongly to men like Robert?"

An amused "No."

"Why not?"

"Because there are n't any men like Mr. Haskell."

"Shoo! that 's good! Then should I appeal to HIM—on a higher plane so to say? Would I be more *en rapport* with the best that 's in him?" She waved her hand airily towards the sky.

"He 's not a toy to be played with."

"My dear young friend, I don't want to play. I 've played enough. I want to be in earnest, and I want to be in earnest with that man more than any other man. You must admit, if you 're a little bit of the woman I think you are, that it would be a thrilling experience to have Robert Haskell take one seriously. Now if he thought—" (here she sidled up against Rachel) "if he thought that I was anxious about my soul——!"

Rachel laughed. "Don't insult his intelligence, Lady Moyne."

"You can call me Molly, but you need n't be rude. I 've got a soul I suppose, rather speckly, but I 'd love Robert to whiten it."

"He 's a busy man, you know. I don't fancy he has much time for whitewashing."

"You really are very rude. I 'm not so black as all that! Do you think his wife would be interested in me?"

Rachel laughed again. "You are incorrigible.

Why do you want those two to be interested in you? You 've got all the rest of the world to choose from."

"Eve had all the other apples off all the other trees in all that beautiful garden to choose from, but she wanted only the one forbidden. That sort of want 's hereditary."

"Oh!"

"Do you think I could interest Mrs. Haskell?"

"Of course you could, but I don't see why you wish to."

"Well now, that 's where you come in. I want you to help. You need n't go rigid; I feel your arm quite stiff. Will you tell Mrs. Haskell about me when next you see her? Say I knew her husband some years ago—you need n't mention how many—and then just throw in that I 'm very unhappy—the sort of woman who 's wandering about in a state of darkness, anxiously, eagerly longing for light. Heavens! What 's that?—not the gong! Oh! It does n't matter. I meant to put on a peachlike thing, but now he 's gone my black will do. Bar humbug, Miss Cremayne—Oh, may I? Thank you—bar humbug, Rachel, I must know that woman. I must see how she has managed to hold my Robert all these paralysed years!"

In the science of life there are partial tones, there are unseen presences. Side by side with the human crowd, is a crowd of unseen forms, Principalities, Powers, and Possibilities. These are unseen but not unfelt.

J. H. Shorthouse.

CHAPTER XXVI

NOT "QUITE QUITE"

MASTER LUMMOND'S education had begun, and only just begun. He was learning many things and absorbing knowledge quicker than ever before in his life, and he was learning in such an easy, pleasant, delightful fashion—nothing uphill about it; all was smooth as smooth.

He saw Mrs. Effell most days. Busy as he was, he was able to find time to call upon her or meet her, and see that she was "all right" and not in want of manly help or advice.

In a week he was conscious of the unsatisfactoriness of his life prior to his visit to Paris; in ten days his eyes were opened, and he knew his engagement to Rachel had been a mistake, and within a fortnight they were so wide open he saw he had been "caught" when he was young and placed in a cruel position, where now any attempt to extricate himself would be deemed most dishonourable.

It seems a very short while in which to have learned such surprising facts, but the devil always works in a mighty hurry, and before Luke met

Rachel again his face bore marks of conflict that seemed strangely at variance with the extreme smoothness of life.

He rushed down to Flittenbridge, it 's true, but he was like a dancing dervish most of the time he was there, and he rushed away again in terror lest someone should speak to him at the last moment and he should thereby miss the train.

He had no time to give orders in the house or the garden. Waters and old Mary must just go on as they were doing. They could keep pigs and chickens if they wanted to. So long as he was n't worried, he did n't mind what they did. Rachel must not expect to see him down quite so often as before. He had become very busy indeed during her illness,—any amount of work; he really had n't a minute; and if he did not write quite regularly, would she be good and know that it all meant better things for her bye and bye? And in this whirlwind of platitudes and excuses he arrived and departed.

To be with Mrs. Effell, to breathe the air she breathed, gave him a new understanding of life. He himself and all his faculties had been moribund, so to say, until he met Mrs. Effell. She sharpened his wits and quickened his spirit, so that he saw, and heard, and felt, as he had never done before. It was so beautiful he was sure he had stepped into the company of angels and been blest.

The blessing did not seem to agree with him very well, partly perhaps because being a new

experience, he confused it now and again with cursing, but that was where the pathos came in—he was so little accustomed to blessings in his life.

He asked Rachel, when he saw her, not to be too exacting with him just then. She did not know it, perhaps, but she was inclined to be a rather exacting woman, and it did not answer with a man of his temperament. Could she understand that he was passing through a time of stress and difficulty, and, while going through it, he must not have his attention diverted from what was occupying his mind? He frowned as he said it was difficult for her to understand; he quite felt that. But he smiled when Rachel humbly said she would try, difficult though it might be.

"It 's not only law as law that I 've got to think of," he admitted one day, "it 's the position I mean to work for in the end. I 'm not sure that I shan't go in regularly for divorce— What 's the matter— What made you wince like that?—Well, don't do it again; there 's a good girl. I 'm not sure, as I was saying, but what I don't see rather a chance for making my name quicker that way than any other. You see, whenever there 's a big case on, they always get a common-law man, and if it were known that I—well, what I mean is, that I rather think my present aim is to be President some day I hope not too far distant.—You don't like it? Well, you know, it 's coming to this, that if you are never going to be satisfied with what I do, I shall end in never telling you. Per-

fectly simple, but I 'd always thought you took an interest.—Yes, looks like it, when I see your face all drawn up in that way! Never mind, tell me what you do want and then I must go.—You know I see the Effell boys' mother now and again in town? I don't want you to go imagining that I 'm keeping things from you because I forget sometimes to tell you in my letters. She 's a very nice woman and kind enough to find me useful, but one can't do much when one 's as busy as I am.

"Oh, you 're glad, are you? Well, I 'm thankful I can still do something right. Quite pleased? I 'm delighted to hear it. I was afraid you might be jealous.—Oh no, no occasion for it, but it does n't follow because I have never given you cause, that you would n't be jealous. Most women are, you know. It does n't make your sex less lovable. Now, if you 've nothing more to say, I must go."

And he went, back to Mrs. Effell—I mean he went back to town, to Circe, that daughter of the gods who by her magic arts could turn men into swine, and Rachel went to the studio to Anna.

She walked in and found him busy as usual and smoking. She asked him for a lump of wet clay and he gave it her.

Rachel manipulated it in her fingers, using tools as the lump took shape and form. When she left the studio later, she left a masterly little devil behind her.

Anna waited till the door was shut and then,

crossing over, stood looking at it, chortling. There was n't any doubt. There was a sureness of touch about that modelling which betokened no amateur performance. It had arrived red-hot out of hell. What could have given it birth? Then he did a curious thing. He took some more clay and, standing before Rachel's handiwork, he copied it as fast as he could.

He worked quickly, and though not satisfied when finished, he put it in the place of the other, which he hid behind his Atalanta; then returned to what he had been doing before.

Towards evening Rachel came in again, as he had expected she would. She walked up to the counterfeit image, which was still soft and pliable, and taking it in her hands, she crushed the impression out of it.

When it was once again a lump of clay, she remoulded it into a little child angel and set it back in its place.

As a specimen of art, it was feeble where the other had been strong; as an illustration of character, it was pretty.

And Lady Moyne achieved her will in the matter of knowing Mrs. Haskell.

She wrote to Robert a charming letter, begging his permission to call on his wife the next time she came to London, to make her acquaintance in consequence of her friendship with him in old days.

Inside the letter was a tiny twist of paper. Robert untwisted it and read—

"*I was only in fun. I did n't mean to be naughty.*"

Robert frowned; read it again, smiled; read it again, laughed; read it a fourth time, and roared.

What a child! What a child! Come? Of course she should come, if Ruth agreed. It might be difficult for him, he quite felt that—she was so extraordinarily engaging. But to have the chance of a pretty thing like that in his house sometimes, was more than mortal man could refuse—also, also there was distinct charm in the very element of danger such a chance provoked.

He burnt the scrap of paper, but he gave Ruth the letter, and Ruth, in some subtle way revealed to womankind, knew there was more in the circumstance than met the eye.

She would like Lady Moyne to come. She had heard all about her from Rachel.

"All?" said Robert, blinking down a twinkle.

"All, Sir—at least all that Rachel knew. I 'm simply dying to see her. Robert, darling, why should n't you have some fun? You work hard enough, goodness knows. Shall I write?"

"Yes," he said slowly, "if you like."

His wife looked at him curiously.

"She is n't dangerous, is she? Because we won't do anything silly."

"I don't think so, but she is intensely feminine, very, very attractive."

"Not like Helen of Troy?"

"Good Heavens! No! I mean she 's quite a different style."

"But might do the same things in such a different way that she would attract instead of repel?"

"Might."

"Then, my dear, I don't know what to say."

Lady Moyne received two letters in answer to her one and laughed as she read them. She went to call on Ruth and knew the first moment they met that sympathy and not antipathy was the prevailing atmosphere of a most unusual personality.

They talked, quite intimately from the start. Presently Robert came in, beaming and smiling, and held out his hand.

Ruth poured out the tea and felt she was looking on as at a scene in a play.

Robert could not stay long, as he had to go to the House, but before leaving he "hoped Lady Moyne would be able to dine some night."

Lady Moyne answered steadily that she should be delighted if she was disengaged when he could be free.

Robert suggested a Saturday, and Lady Moyne feared she would be out of town. Ruth looked in the book and said, "Friday next week you 've got nothing."

"Would that suit you, Lady Moyne?"

"Yes" she answered sweetly, "and where shall we dine?"

"Here," Robert answered equally sweetly.

In the end she left the room when he did. He saw her off and then came back to the drawing-room.

"Well, what do you think?"

"My poor boy, I think she 's most alluring!"

"My poor darling, I think so too! You 'll really have to look after me—I will not—no guiles, no wiles shall persuade me to take her out alone, you understand that."

Ruth nodded, smiling.

"You 're in to play a very old game, dear. Do you feel equal to it?"

Robert stooped and kissed her.

"Try, but the bowling is going to be tricky, my angel. You must 'call time,' will you?"

CHAPTER XXVII

RACHEL LEARNS TO MODEL

RACHEL had taken to modelling as another woman takes to needle-work.

She had found her métier. Her fingers moved in obedience to her brain, and every member of the family was represented in turn.

She received much encouragement from Anna, who implied that she scarcely missed being a genius. Her likenesses were really striking.

A plaster cast of a devil leered from a little pedestal behind Atalanta's skirts, and Rachel regarded his existence as a mystery.

And towards the studio one afternoon came a man whose face was not to be found amongst that row of heads on Rachel's shelf. He sauntered along, hands in pockets, dejection bowing him low. Words repeated themselves over and over again in his brain, words which had made him furious, words which had stung him to anger, not because they were unjust, but just because of their sweet reasonableness.

He had answered them in a storm of passion and

had received no reply. He had conned over the situation till he was sick. He had seen himself in a sorry plight, the plight of a man jilted after many years of an engagement long made public—he, a man of mark, both legally and politically.

"It 's not because I have ceased to care. I care just as much as I ever did—possibly more than I have ever done. It is because if I cannot help you in your career, I am afraid I shall hinder you, and I would rather you should do well even without me, than that you should do less well, perhaps, with me."

This was what repeated itself over and over again till he was worn out with the friction and irritation set up by the suggestion contained in those words.

He looked in at the window and saw Rachel was alone, working intently with her back towards him, blind and deaf to all outside a lump of clay.

Some heaven-born instinct sprang into life and prompted him to do the right thing. He climbed silently over the window-sill, stepped softly up to the worker, and clasped her suddenly in his arms. She could not speak, for he stopped her lips with kisses. She could not free herself, for he held her in a vice. Primitive man with a woman taken unawares.

"You don't mean it! You don't mean it! You can't mean it! You can't live without me any more than I can live without you! I know I 've been horrid and disgusting, but I thought it

did n't matter when people loved one another as we do. It does n't matter, Rachel, say it does n't matter; that you 'll never give me up whatever I do. Of course, I 'm not good enough, but do you think it 's fair for a really good woman to throw away a man when he 's bad? What chance has he got, poor devil, when good women do that?"

The lump of clay took on no shape. The tools remained untouched. The woman was swayed by the pressure of the man's arms, but her reason, her judgment, her affection, did not swerve. If, when she tried with all her heart and soul, he had the power to prevent her helping him, he might some day also have the power to prevent her loving him.

She tried to set a distance between them, but he followed her to the big chair, and when she sat down, he knelt on the dusty floor and put his arms round her knees.

"You can't do it, Rachel, you can't pick me out of your life now and throw me away. I won't be thrown. You 're the only woman in the world I 've ever wanted to marry. Won't you believe that? You have n't been happy since you wrote me that beastly letter, have you? You 've been as miserable as I have. Say you 'll stick to me till death. I want you to."

She began slowly. "If you will——"

"Don't bargain!" The man shuddered. "There's no bargaining in love. Be generous, dear, and say you 'll love me whatever I do. Let me feel I 'm

anchored when the storms roll high. Let me be able to say 'Rachel cares,' when everybody else thinks me a beast. Is this what it means to be good, Rachel, to turn away from some poor wretch who can't be as good as you? Oh, Rachel," he put his head down on her knee, "and I have wanted you so many years!"

She laid a hand on his hair but did not speak.

"It was a great mistake our not marrying in the beginning. I see that now. I ought to have been firm about it, but I so dreaded poverty for you, and then when we could have, politics intervened. It was you who put it off then. I wonder if I was wise to listen to you?"

"Mr. Haskell tried to make it possible for us long before that."

"Does it rankle, dear? I had to use my own judgment on that occasion. I did it for the best, Rachel, but if I had known you wanted to get married more than anything, I——"

He found himself on the floor with Rachel standing.

"You 'll never know," she said. "It 's useless ever to tell you, because you never understand."

He rose slowly, facing her. "Is it altogether my fault? I don't seem to be able to understand. I try and I fail, and you don't care."

He went towards the door. Rachel put her hand over her eyes. If only he would go! When she looked again, he was standing there, the picture of misery.

"Good-bye, then, good-bye to the best woman a man has ever known."

Rachel dashed away her tears and sprang forward. That fatal maternal instinct rose dominant within her. If it were not his fault, if there were truly some obstacle to his understanding, what then? Why, it behoved her all the more to stand by him and give him of her strength.

So he came back, and after further talk, in which he appeared more of a child than ever, asking her pathetically whether she objected to his friendship with "Peter John's" wife, whether she were like "other women," grudging him a little fun if it were obtained away from her, he went away smiling, in the certainty she grudged him nothing, and happy in having extracted a promise that she would stick to him always. Whatever he did, she would never break with him, never!

And about this time Rachel's original feeling regarding the Waterses revived. Old Mary no longer spoke with fulsome adulation of the master she claimed to have nursed as a baby, and Waters himself frequently came up to the house on the excuse of asking Miss Cremayne's advice in matters Mr. Lummond had no time to see to.

Rachel knew—of course without proof—that something lay at the back of this change of front, something that made old Mary eye her with a difference, something that caused a previous antagonism on the older woman's part to melt almost

into sympathy. Yet she had no idea of what it could be, and further, hoped she might never know.

Sometimes it seemed as if she were living a double life,—the plain, wholesome, simple life of her girlhood, loved by father and mother, trusted by brothers and sisters, honoured by hosts of pleasant and cultured friends; and a winding, tortuous, agitated life, in which love and trust and honour were continually in danger of being betrayed.

And yet it was Waters who brought her a great piece of news, for between the last parting and their next meeting Luke had an adventure, which was promptly reported in all the evening papers.

Placards appeared at street corners bearing the words:

M. P. RISKS HIS LIFE FOR A CHILD
EXCITING SCENES
MOTHER FAINTS WITH JOY

All of which was true.

A party including a baby were boating on the Thames. The baby fell into the lock; nobody, of course, knew how. The mother gave a wild scream but had sufficient self-control in her good clothes not to jump in after it.

"Quick!" she called, and a man began to take off his coat. "Anything, anything, for the man who saves my child!" At the second "anything" she caught the eye of Master Lummond. A flash,

a hint of intelligence, and Master Lummond, dropping into the lock, seized the precious white bundle.

The deed was done; a contract had been signed, —but this was not mentioned in the evening papers.

Therefore, when Waters brought a 'late edition' to the house during dinner, he received congratulations from his friends in the pantry, and felt himself to be a man of some importance. When the papers reached the dining-room, Miss Cremayne rose from dessert and came out, with shining eyes, to speak to him.

It was indeed a splendid thing; not that Luke should save a child from death—any man surely would do that—but that Luke should so far forget himself as to plunge into cold and dirty water at a sudden cry for help.

Now indeed Rachel felt justified for all she had maintained in the face of opposition, even though it had been chiefly silent opposition.

Luke had shewn himself to others all that she instinctively knew him to be—a fine, brave man, capable of great things if only the opportunity were afforded him.

She returned to the dining-room, every face smiling with pleasure for her. Her father retained the paper, and she leaned over his shoulder to read it again.

"Well done, Luke, well done, Luke," the General kept saying. "How pleased those boys will be; make him a hero for ever!"

After this things moved pretty rapidly for Luke. He was borne along on "angel" wings. Whither, it was not always easy for him to say, but of one thing he was very sure, that whereas formerly life had been for him one continual struggle, it was now a "blessed peace."

And he put off coming down to Flittenbridge time after time. He received letters in shoals, and added to his reputation by the excessive modesty with which he accepted many kind and flattering words.

By the time he did come down his heroism was partly forgotten and another aspect of the case was rudely presented to view.

"What were you doing on the river, sly dog, when all your friends and constituents, not to mention Miss Cremayne, were expecting you down here?"

It was so "rude" that Luke was speechless, being totally unprepared for such an attack as this. All he might have said seethed round in his brain in a million brilliant repartees, though taking form only in a common burst of irritation at Rachel's first words on the subject.

"It was n't a bit fine or brave. Anyone would have done it. I 'm sick to death of the incident. For mercy's sake, don't treat me to a scene!"

This, of course, was not at all rude; yet the smile of pride, though a little dimmed in Rachel's eyes, was hard to extinguish altogether.

"All right, dear, but you like me to be pleased?

Remember I have n't seen you or had a chance of saying all I——"

"Good God! Are you going to throw that in my teeth? Of course I 'm the most unsatisfactory man you ever knew. I know that perfectly well by now, but I don't intend to be told it every time I set foot in this place. I knew that would be the line you 'd take! That 's why I delayed coming. What 's the matter? Are you going to faint?"

Anna came into the room and Rachel passed him white as a sheet with her eyes starting almost out of her head.

"Ha!" said Anna gaily. "The very man I want to see. May I say——"

"Anything except congratulations on my 'heroism,' but I can't stay now. I must go and see after Rachel. She looked rather funny."

"Right," said Anna, "I only wanted my 'Roget.' You have n't taken it, have you? Ah! there it is. Now, you might help me as you are musical. What 's the best definition of harmonics?"

Luke did not answer, save with a gutteral sound of discontent, and Anna ran his fingers through the pages murmuring to himself, "Harmonics—harmonics—here we are. 'Melody, concord, rhythm, measure, timbre, intonation, tuneful, silvery, clear as a bell.' Seems to describe someone we know, does n't it? and side by side goes—— 'Discord, dissonance, cacophony,

caterwauling, harshness, untuneful, Babel, cats' concert'——,"

Anna looked up laughing, but Luke was n't there to laugh with him.

What can you expect from a pig but a grunt?
—*English Proverb.*

CHAPTER XXVIII

AND ASKS THE BISHOP'S ADVICE

THE Bishop of Shoreditch was sitting in his study and opposite him was his god-daughter, Rachel Cremayne.

There was silence after the customary greetings while the Bishop referred to a letter from her in his hand. Then he said,

"Well, and what is it you want me to do?"

She answered, "Something quite simple. I want you to curse somebody for me."

She said it so quietly his Lordship took refuge in the silence of surprise.

"It is quite legitimate under the circumstances."

"May I know them? I can hardly exercise such power without doing so."

"Yes, you may know them. Only don't be kind, don't be sympathetic. I do not want to break down. I have done that before—perhaps you may remember. Well, all the faith and hope we talked about and tried to feel, has been unjustified, and the facts have reached me in a most curious way. Somebody, whom, in spite of strong-

est instincts, I have still tried to think well of, still tried to give the benefit of the doubt, has trailed her sickly slime across Lulu's path."

The voice was soft and melodious, and the man in the Bishop's apron, winced perceptibly at the horrid words in that pretty mouth.

"I want you to curse her because it is fitting. She is the accursèd thing. I would not put out a hand to hurt her myself, any more than I would dirty my shoe by stepping on a slug, but I want her rendered harmless from this day forward by depriving her of her peculiar charm as you would deprive a reptile of its sting, and that can be done as I suggest."

"And what form do you propose this curse should take?"

"Very, very long life first of all, with an awful, awful illness—the worst sort of thing you can possibly think of, leprosy perhaps, something that shows outwardly what she really is inwardly, something that makes her as repulsive to others as she is to me."

The Bishop balanced the paper knife to a nicety on his second finger and seemed absorbed in maintaining it there. Then he raised his eyes and looked steadily at his god-child. She returned the gaze unmoved.

"I suppose you think I am mad—I never was saner—but all the concentrated essence of fury that might have been spread about in a ladylike way over years of small annoyances, has just

taken possession of me, and I feel this evil must be stamped out."

She never raised her voice and no anger was apparent except in the words she used. The Bishop recognised an old, old story, virtue rampant against vice, even as vice has been rampant against virtue since the world began.

"I have always hated evil," she went on, "as I hate the dark to this day, but it has been in the abstract far away and distant till lately, and now the horrible thing has come close to me, almost touched me—worse, has touched what I loved best and made it vile like itself. Gruff! Who taught me to hate evil? Who taught me to love and believe in everything that was pure and good? You! and can you sit there unmoved while you know that Lulu has been made a liar, and a coward, and a beast?"

Tears were brimming her eyes, but she would not let them fall, and the man's distress was as great as her own, though it did not show.

"You forget I am in the dark," he said, "as to facts."

"The facts are these. I have hated this friendship from the first because of its effect on Luke. I could not, because I had no proof, no right to think it was she who was evil, but I saw her influence was evil. She had an almost magical effect on him. He could not, from the time he met her, he simply could not speak the truth. That was what first roused me, when he told me a

lie and tried to justify it with a laugh. Then he got a shifty look in his eye, and a shuffling sort of manner. He did not hold himself straight, but sat and walked with his head hunched down in his shoulders. He took to using swear words and never said 'Sorry' as the boys always do if they forget. Gruff, it was awful to see him changing like that and be powerless to stop him—not to know the reason and to have to fight with suspicion, because one hated to be either bitter or petty. Lastly, everything that was good incurred his wrath or his sarcasm: to a good book he said faugh! a good man was a prig, a good woman, if such existed! a prude, but he could generally trust himself to find out their weak points! Well, some months ago, there were letters, nothing more original than that, treated carelessly, left about anywhere, for anyone to read if they had that sort of mind. And after Luke went back to London in October, Waters brought me a packet of various papers and asked me what he should do with them, as he did not think they were worth keeping or forwarding. I told him to put them down and I would see to them. They lay in front of me and suddenly, as I gazed at the heap, I knew what they were and why Waters had brought them. I felt that he, and goodness knows how many others, were aware of every written word, and that it was deemed advisable by him and his that I should have this chance of knowledge also. I fetched the sugar tongs from the other room,

—hard on the tongs, was n't it, but I could n't touch them with my fingers,—and I picked up the heap, opened a drawer in the cabinet, one that 's never used, standing in the corner, and slid in the lot. The writing that I hate appeared and disappeared, and appeared again as the envelopes slipped off one another, and I shut them away till such time as Luke should return."

"Then?"

"Then one day coming back from the Cricket Field, I called for the second post and walked as far as that old log in the wood and sat down to open my letters, only two and a flat square packet. The letters were nothing of consequence, but the flat thing contained photographs of handwriting. I thought in a lazy way it was some new advertisement, and I turned them over till one arrested my attention. It was an envelope addressed 'Luke Lummond, Esq., M.P., Flittenbridge Park.' It was beautifully photographed, postmarks quite clear, the stamp, everything. I had never seen letters reproduced like this and it interested me—still without scenting danger. Then I began to read the sheets. There seemed no beginning, so I could not tell which was the first page. As I went on, it dawned on me the handwriting was familiar. Then the intimacy of the style opened my eyes. I read on and saw things—I need not tell you—anyway there was no doubt who had penned them, even if the hieroglyph that did for a signature had not been decipherable."

The Bishop sat immovable. His mouth sternly drooped at the corners, and eyeing his godchild through half-closed lids.

"You don't perhaps believe all this. I can show you the packet if——"

But he put up his hand. "I would rather not. Have you any idea who sent them?"

"Not the faintest. No name or initials or anything anywhere, and the postmark London, which tells one nothing."

The Bishop shook himself and almost growled.

"How did they come to be photographed at all? And even so, why were they sent to you?"

"I can't tell. It may be whoever did it thinks they are doing me a kindness. Still, it 's curious that after refusing to read these things when I had chance after chance, they should be forced into my hands in that fashion."

"Humph! Are they the same letters you put into the drawer, or others by the same hand?"

"I don't know, they may be. I never looked at the ones in the drawer. But none of these pages joined consecutively. It looks as if several letters had each had a sheet photographed out of them, but as you say, for what reason? One showed plainly that, at times for personal motives, it' s a pathetic case of Satan trying to cast out Satan! Now will you do as I wish?"

"Have you let Luke know about them?"

"Only vaguely. I asked him not to have anything sent here that he would not like me to see,

and he said he never did, should not think of such a thing, and I—I hit him with all my might."

"H'm."

"Yes. Can you believe it, Gruff? Can you believe I am really the little girl you brought up so well? Oh, it was not for nothing you dinned into me that horror of lies and evil! I could have killed Luke then, when he told me that, and I had the proof of his guilt under my hand. Perhaps I am just as wicked, perhaps more, for I have had a better chance than he."

"Poor little girl."

"No, don't pity me, but just curse that woman for me, please."

"I don't yet know who she is."

" The mother of those two nice boys, Giles and Rupert."

"What!"

The man's frown intensified the look of repugnance on his face.

"Yes, difficult to believe, is n't it, and there is a younger one still being trained, no doubt, in the way he should go, by maternal influence and example. Luke has developed a very exalted opinion of mother's love just lately. The wonderful sacrifices a woman will make for her child have filled him with fervour. Now, will you curse the creature?"

A slow shake of the head was the only answer.

"You won't?"

Another shake.

"It is not necessary. She has cursed herself. My dear, you will see that it is so."

"Well," slowly, "I hope God will make sure, and smite her with dry rot as well! Yes, go away and pray for me, my poor Gruff. I need it. Yet I have often thought that when Luke calls me a good woman, he means, in his heart, I 'm a nincompoop!"

The Bishop put his arm round her, but she did not cry, as she used to do in the old days when she had done wrong and wanted to be forgiven. Ah, how different then and now!

Now she simply blazed, and the man could not but admire the spirit of the girl as she stood there before him, unconsciously but virtually an angel with a flaming sword guarding her Eden from the approach of evil.

Yet when he spoke, he spoke sternly. He told her there was only one thing to be done. She must break with Lummond.

She answered, "I can't."

"Why not?"

"Because I promised him—" the tight clasp of her hands twisted her fingers, "I promised him I wouldn 't."

The Bishop almost flung her from him.

"When did you do this?"

"Oh, I don't know, some time ago."

"Because you loved him, or because you hoped to keep him straight?"

"Both."

"Has he behaved better since your promise?"

She moved her head quietly. "What does it matter? I 've promised."

The man strode round the room, and then up to the girl.

"Do you mean to tell me he got you to promise to stick to him under any circumstances?"

"I promised of my own free will to stick to him —whatever he did."

"Good God, the man 's a demon!"

"I don't think so, Gruff—I don't think he can help it somehow."

"Har-r-r," the sound was almost a snarl and the Bishop simply glared at Rachel. The fire was alight in both their souls. "You can't live with that sort of thing. You! A sudden temptation, a sudden fall is one thing, but this dallying with evil when you are willing to stand by him and help him!"

The man could not keep still. The mere suggestion made his blood boil. He walked up and down, and Rachel was then the quieter of the two. She just said, "I know."

"The finest character in the world may slip or fall in the mud and gutter of life, God knows, but what of the character that chooses to stay in the mire and get enjoyment out of the situation?"

"That, Gruff, is why I asked you to curse. It 's the only thing to do with a devil."

The Bishop pulled up short in front of her.

"Try and think when you promised him this. Was it before you knew, for certain?"

"I 've always known, I knew it before it happened, and I knew what it meant when I promised."

"Then all this time, you have been complacently —pandering to vice! You!"

The sudden change of tone in a voice that had never before spoken other than kindly made Rachel catch her breath in a sob. Then the injustice sent the colour flying to her face, and she flung up her head to bring it nearer on a level with his.

"I have—never—done that."

"Forgive me. I can't take this thing quietly. Did he know what he was doing when he let you make such a promise, or did he really mean to pull up?"

"I can't say."

"You still intend to stick to him? You can't. You don't know what it means."

"I 've got a pretty good idea."

The man felt the full force of the woman's determination. Yet he went on sternly,

"To shelter himself behind your skirts, and then to behave badly to you—it 's diabolical!"

"It is n't worse than other people do. Heaps of wives are doing what I am doing."

The Bishop groaned. Worldly wisdom in Rachel was hateful.

"Yes, but you are n't his wife and I hope to

God you never will be. I tell you, Rachel, that Mrs. Effell and all her works fade into nothingness beside such meanness of soul as this."

"Yes, I feel that."

To say that the Bishop was distressed gives no idea what he felt while Rachel talked to him, and afterwards. He was grievously wounded for her, and also for that young man she loved, still further for the woman who had forgotten so much. Here the charity that covers sins came promptly to the fore. Perhaps she had never learned, never been taught. Common-sense rivalled this view before it could get a hold: a real woman does not want teaching—nor does she ever forget—some things.

He walked up and down his room thinking over the problems of life. He was confronted with them every day. This was no new thing in itself —only, it touched some one who, he had prayed, might never come up against the coarse or the gross, might be kept always from all things hurtful; and yet here she was face to face with a huge, enormous difficulty, brought to her knowledge too by the one man in all the world whose pleasure and duty should have been to shield and protect her from contact therewith, but who had failed.

Turn the thing which way he would, he could see no excuse. Luke was not a boy any longer. He had made up his mind to be married and had chosen Rachel for his wife in no careless, hot-headed mood. But this Mrs. Effell, wife of an

old friend, "Mother of those two nice boys"—the description was not meant to be scathing, yet, could any words be more so?— A "mother of sons" to rouse an evil spirit in another man already the property of another woman—it was a hideous position! Down, deep, deep, down in his heart was the wish that Rachel could have chosen to place her affections elsewhere. He would have so rejoiced to see her wed with a mind and a brain superior to her own. She had been trained with such scrupulous care, was so fitted to be the help-meet for one who would build his house on a rock after battling with the elements of nature, neither minimising nor ridiculing the dangers and struggles through which he had passed, anxious as she would be to set up a light or a beacon that others in shipwreck near should at least not have to fight in the dark. This was the sort of man he had planned for his godchild's husband, and instead—unless Rachel could be brought to see the impossibility of such a thing—it was going to be Luke.

A week later the Bishop was disturbed in his morning work by the entrance of his godchild.

Rachel's face was full of distress as she came up to him and said breathlessly, "You were right, you were quite right. Read that," and she put a slip of paper into his hand.

"I burnt those photographs. I could not keep them. It was like housing an evil thing, so I burnt them all, every one, and out of the white ash I saw the devil's face quite plainly. No, it

was not imagination. I saw it as distinctly as I see you, and when I turned away, this bit of paper was lying face upwards on the floor. I don't know where it came from—it' s all of a piece with the horrible thing itself. Are n't you right? Has not the woman cursed herself? Could we have ever thought of anything so fiendish? Oh Gruff, those boys, those poor boys!"

Rachel's voice had a sob in it. She thought of her turbulent knights, Giles and Rupert, reading on some far-distant day the story she had read, and saw them hurt in their faithful hearts as she too had been hurt, and she knew if it were possible to save them from this knowledge, she would not hesitate. But it was not possible and tears filled her eyes; not tears of self-pity this time —that was how she had changed since the day she had first said, "Curse me this woman."

The Bishop was reading the typewritten slip, four lines, clear and distinct.

"Copies of these enclosures are in reserve and will be sent in due course

"To Giles Effell on attaining the age of twenty-one years.

"To Rupert Effell on attaining the age of twenty-one years.

"To Humphrey Effell on attaining the age of twenty-one years."

There was a long silence broken at last by Rachel.

"Who can be at the back of all this, Gruff, and why?"

The Bishop shook his head, still gazing at the horrible words. "I should say a most bitter and implacable enemy."

"What can we do—to prevent——?"

"Nothing."

His Lordship deliberately struck a match and in silence a bit of charred blackness fell into the scrap-basket.

"Now," he said, "don't think of this matter again. It is taken out of your hands as mysteriously as it was put in. Forget it—only you must see the utter impossibility of this marriage ever coming to pass."

"Those boys," Rachel said again. "Those boys, Gruff."

"Thank God they 're not girls," growled the Bishop.

Man-like is it to fall into sin,
Fiend-like is it to dwell therein;
Christ-like is it for sin to grieve,
God-like is it all sin to leave.

Longfellow.

CHAPTER XXIX

ROBERT HASKELL TAKES HER HOME

Tout passe, tout casse, tout lasse, Dieu seul reste
Nothing lasts for ever.
The longest lane has a turning, and
When the tale of bricks is heaviest, then Moses comes

IT was the last of these trite observations that seemed to give Rachel most comfort, if that can be called comfort which means the slightest lessening of the deadly pressure on a heart beating out its life-blood to give vitality to another.

If she could keep going, if she could be brave enough, all might yet be well. If she could have no fear—fear was of the devil. She would never be afraid of letting go of Luke—of that she was absolutely certain. He might let her go, but she would never let him go of her own accord. She would hold him always, so long as he would be held.

And the daily life went on just the same—notes had to be written, visitors to be seen, meals to be ordered, clothes to be worn. Rachel had to

smile over these things; otherwise how could she keep her secret?

And amongst other plans and engagements, later on in the summer, demanding attention was the huge Primrose League entertainment given by the Winyons.

Lady Winyon, as Dame President, had invited all the neighbourhood with a programme sufficiently enticing and varied to attract all whose minds and bodies could be charmed with the delights of 'Merry-go-rounds,' dancing on the green, much refreshment, bands, and fireworks.

Posters and handbills for miles around also informed the world that Mr. Haskell, K.C., M.P., and Mr. Luke Lummond, M.P., would speak on the present political situation.

These very important people were standing together earlier in the day in the hall of Flittenbridge, where the General and Tom and several other men were all seeking some particular coat or hat or glove from the laid-out assortment that might have stocked a tailor's shop.

The women of the house were helping or hindering according to the view the man of the moment took regarding their kindly interest, as each, when ready, had the *coup d'œil* thrown over him that made him thereby feel a little prouder or a little sadder than he did before.

Mingling with the many appeals to Bolton or to James, the voice of Rose, the married daughter, was heard softly adjuring her father not to wear

a hat that would disgrace a tramp, while Mrs. Cremayne supported her with a gentle murmur of "It 's really green with age, my darling."

Rose's husband was calling for gloves; Tom demanded of everyone whether his tie was straight; another hoped, with an affectionate pat, that his hair would remain in curl; while yet another sought for a missing cigar case, and all desired matches at once.

In the pleasing hubbub Robert Haskell pathetically remarked to Rachel, "As no one takes any interest in me, I may as well go and get in." Then when Rachel laughed, he laid a kindly, detaining hand on Lummond's arm. "You want a little attention," he said; "some of yesterday's mud on your coat, I think."

Lummond glared. Rachel came near, and he walked straight to the door with a look that said plainly, "Rob me of that and I 'll never speak to you again!"

At last they were off, and the women turned back, commenting to each other

"Talk of us fussing!"

"I quite agree, my dear."

"It 's a mercy the men have got some business to do first, so that we can follow peacefully later."

"And now—what 's everybody going to wear this afternoon?"

Everybody of course wore what they had always intended to wear; everybody looked charming; and

the men of the Flittenbridge party greeted the women of the Flittenbridge party with distinct signs of pride and pleasure on their arrival in time for the best part of the programme.

After tea came the speeches. Luke asked to be allowed to speak first on the plea that no one would listen to him after Mr. Haskell, and his speech was surprising in its brilliancy and wit. He spoke easily and happily, with enough movement to add interest but not to detract from the subject-matter. The many recent Education Bills he tore to shreds with sarcasm that was both amusing and stimulating. He was at his best and his hearers sat entranced beyond the time allotted to him without being conscious of the fact.

One amongst them winced inwardly from time to time. The Nonconformist conscience was the object at which Luke hurled his most salient gibes. The words flew from his brain without effort, and he was very, very funny. Roars of laughter punctuated his speech, and Rachel felt the thrill of appreciation pass through the crowd and check; then it was she winced. Though sitting in the front row, she was conscious of those in the back. It hurt her when they were hit.

Old Terrapy, steeped in dissent, would think less than ever of the Church after this; Mary Morwen, Chapel-goer all her life, would fail to recognise such talk as "Christian" at all; James, the footman, Methodist in private life, would wonder Mr. Lummond dared to laugh at sacred things;

while Wills the groom, first started in honest employment by the Salvation Army, might resent the order to attend service where the worshippers had so little reverence for others differing from them in their creed.

However, the applause, when he finished, was all that anyone could wish, and then, as it died away, the Chairman announced his pleasure in calling on Mr. Haskell.

The audience re-settled itself for serious talk, and Robert gave it them. He started on the general outlook both at home and abroad. He spoke of the ever-present possibility of war, and of the necessity of unceasing preparation for it if peace was to be preserved. He spoke of the effect of both on the civilised nations of the world, and he showed how races, like individuals, developed their best through times of strife and stress rather than in days of established law and order.

It was a fine, statesmanlike speech, and after a slight pause it came to a close with a smiling introduction of the question of "woman's suffrage."

Amidst a breathless silence Mr. Haskell let fall the words,

"I am distinctly in favour of it. I can find no logical reason for refusing votes to women."

The cheers, the applause, the stamping of boots, the thumping of umbrellas, were fairly rivalled by the booing, the hissing, the cries of "shame," the defiant roar, dimly conscious of defeat.

Robert stood, waiting. Rachel quivered with

excitement. She had not expected this, and the feeling of tension increased.

Every time he opened his mouth, the two opposing elements closed it again. Women were the chief offenders; those wishing for votes were apparently far outnumbered by those who would not have them at any price.

After several minutes of uproar, Robert turned to the Chairman, who half rose. The noise died down, and individual voices called, "Go on, Sir, go on. Finish it out."

"Thank you," said Robert. "I have very little more to say. I think if the time has come when women wish to have the vote, they ought to have it. But I also think, if the time has come when they ought to have it, men should wish to give it them. My advice to you to-day therefore is—some of you won't like it, I know—it 's dull and unenterprising—It is this: 'Wait.' You have waited for years—I am quite aware of that—but if by waiting a little longer, or even for years longer, you get the vote offered you courteously, chivalrously, on bended knee, by the other sex who shall desire your help in the great affairs of life as they do now in the small, surely it will be better worth having than by scratching for it, fighting for it, and perhaps getting it with sullen tempers and spirits that rankle at having to submit to the then acknowledged force of public opinion. I feel so strongly on the subject that in the interests of my own country, and to emphasise what I

myself see in the future, I cannot do better than quote some words of Professor Thomas with which I will conclude my speech. They are these, 'Certain it is that no civilisation can remain the highest if another civilisation adds to the intelligence of its men the intelligence of its women.'"

He sat down and the place rose, magnetism and electricity shooting sparks in all directions.

Later in the evening, after many invitations to "ride upon horses," Rachel found herself with Luke Lummond waiting for a return motor to take them home. They had exhausted all the joys of the fair and had seen the end of the firework display. All their party had gone, and somehow they two had been left with a promise of being fetched speedily.

Lummond was fuming at having to wait. He was tired; he had had a long day; he would like to have gone hours ago; he could n't think how it was he had missed the first departures, as he might have gone with them.

Rachel agreed that he might, but thought at the same time it was rather nice to have the prospect of a quiet drive home together instead of "a chattering squash," and just then Sir Victor came up behind them.

"That 's all right," he said, catching their attention. "Haskell is still here and was afraid you might have gone without him."

"No, we're waiting for a car," Rachel said. "But we thought he had gone."

"So sorry, *Mademoiselle*, when a third body comes to spoil it all!"

Lummond stopped to speak to a man just driving off; then he hurried up to Rachel.

"Look here, Dawson has offered to give me a lift. He wants to talk to me about something, so I 'll go home with him—see? You 'll be all right, won't you?"

"Oh!" Rachel demurred. "Supposing they don't send the car——"

"Well, my staying won't make it come, will it? Besides, you 've got Haskell. Of course they 'll send—" and he was gone.

For some inexplicable reason Miss Cremayne was determined to find someone else who would be glad of a lift Flittenbridge way. She did not know really why it seemed so essential to discover other belated members of their party, but she assured Mr. Haskell there were others, and they must not start without them.

Mr. Haskell sought through the diminishing crowd, but without success. Lady Winyon knew that everybody had gone. Sir Victor also knew he had said good-bye to the General and Mrs. General, to—he ticked off everybody by name and affirmed the pleasure it would be to defer making the same remark to Mr. Haskell and Miss Cremayne till the following morning.

The chauffeur was appealed to and said his

orders were to fetch Miss Cremayne, Mr. Haskell, and Mr. Lummond. Everybody else had arrived before he started.

"I 'm afraid," Robert said, "there 's nothing for it but to veil our disappointment and drive back together as pleasantly as we can." He paused with his foot on the step. "If you do see anyone going our way, Jarvers, you might stop, in case Miss Cremayne wishes to drive them home."

"Very good, sir." They were off.

The engines went round faster and faster. There was no moon, and they did not meet a soul.

"What a good speech!"

"Yes, but I 've heard him do better."

"I meant yours."

"Oh! Did you like it?"

"Everyone says it was so diplomatic, and just like you!"

"Very kind of them."

"You 've a high idea of women."

"I know such nice women."

"But they 're not all fit to govern."

"All the women I know are quite as fit as the men—Ruth and you and——"

"Coupling me with Ruth! and Lady Moyne, I suppose you were going to say——"

"Perhaps you did not hear, I mentioned Lady Moyne as being fit to govern."

"So glad you reminded me. Especially Lady Moyne."

The wheels seemed whirling quicker.

"What does it feel like, to move a whole multitude with your lightest word?"

"I don't know. I 'm never conscious of the multitude. I try to move a unit as a rule."

"Rather disconcerting for the unit. Do you choose haphazard?"

"Quite haphazard. It happened to be you to-night."

"—I wish I 'd known!"

As no answer came to this, Rachel felt she had scored one, and laughed inwardly. She longed to know if Mr. Haskell were equally amused.

She went on laughing silently for several minutes. It was all so silly, and she felt the next remark was due from him—she had been quite funny enough in the last. But no other followed. Perhaps he had gone to sleep.

Suddenly they slackened speed and pulled up. Jarvers feared a puncture. Robert got out to help, and Rachel sat back in her corner quite unreasonably happy.

When they went on again, their mood had changed.

"I wish Ruth could have heard you to-night, she would have been so proud."

"I wish she could, but she will some day; she 's going to be well quite soon."

"Are you so sure?"

"Of course I am, she can stand already."

"Would that I had your faith!"

"You 've got more. You 've got a much bigger mountain to move than I have."

"Do you—do you realise?"

"Yes, I 'm only trying to help a paralysed body; you are trying to help a paralysed will— Far, far harder."

Rachel was quite silent. It was the first idea she had that Robert Haskell "understood," and she knew not what to say, just because she longed to say so much and yet hesitated to say even a little.

"I did n't—know you— 'saw'——"

"One can't help seeing and feeling. You are very, very plucky, if I may say so."

"Oh!" Rachel shivered—from anyone else, an impertinence, from him it seemed the greatest praise she could ever hope to have in her life. She felt speechless with the desire to tell him how grateful she was, mixed with a desire to cry.

"That 's where women are so much finer than men. Do you think I could have borne it if, every time I had some new thing to try, Ruth had flung me off with, 'Do leave me alone. I don't want to be cured. I 'm quite happy as I am'? It would have driven me mad. Do you think I could have gone about cheery and gay as y—y—as a woman can?"

Rachel could n't speak.

"It 's taught us one thing very strongly—that the flesh profiteth nothing. It is the spirit that giveth life. You 've learned that too."

"Yes."

Then, as if in unconscious contradiction, she put out her hand in the dark and touched his hand.

Mr. Haskell held it; then he loosed it suddenly.

"Life 's damned hard for both of us, Rachel, ——" and gripped her in his arms.

Only a moment. The next, Rachel was sitting bolt upright on the edge of her seat, her hand letting the window down slowly, and her eyes looking out into the night.

Robert Haskell was far back in his corner, motionless.

The wheels went round and round, but something was flying faster than any wheel, and self-control—result of ages—was grimly determined to keep the pace.

. . . .

Only a moment; yet just one of those moments mortals find it so difficult not to forget as many try, or to deny, as some do, but to keep in due proportion in the memory where all the other moments leave so little trace.

Only a moment, in which Robert Haskell had made one spring straight from the heights down to the plains, and the shock to Rachel was probably quite as great as the jar to himself.

"It was my fault, my fault," Rachel kept saying to the Recording Angel. "Don't write this down against him. It was my fault, putting out

my hand, due possibly then to an overcharged motherly instinct. He would never have forgotten but for that. My fault, my fault."

Later she said—not to the Angel— 'Would this have happened if one of the others had driven back? Was it just a weak moment in which he wanted sympathy from somebody, or was it just because it happened to be me?" A wave of thankfulness passed over her soul that it had n't happened to be Lady Moyne.

As she rearranged her thoughts and ideas, and got Mr. Haskell back into the place he had always occupied, she wondered why it should have been loyalty to Ruth from which her action sprang so promptly, rather than a loyalty to Lummond. She did not disguise from herself that no thought of Lummond had crossed her mind, but she knew it was for Ruth she had helped him to remember.

And after passing through a whole gamut of sensations, the latest which danced before her eyes and long kept them free of sleep, was a sense of elation—very much the same, in a milder degree, as Robert himself had enjoyed that evening he supped with Helen of Troy, though Rachel, of course, knew nothing of this.

A gentleman makes no noise, a lady is serene.
R. W. Emerson.

CHAPTER XXX

"OLD MARY"

THE something that Mr. Dawson had to say to Lummond was not at all acceptable to the hearer.

It was nothing more nor less than a piece of advice, on a particularly private matter.

Rumour had it that Lummond's servant, Waters, had become head-poacher of the neighbourhood. He would most assuredly be caught before long, for feeling was running very high; therefore, as those interested were always the last to hear rumours affecting themselves, he, Mr. Dawson, was glad of a chance to give Mr. Lummond a hint.

If he might, he would advise Mr. Lummond to take Waters back to town and there dismiss him, as, with an election in prospect, it was unwise to encourage bad feeling amongst his constituents.

Lummond was full of wrath. He received the advice with a very bad grace. He was quite sure Waters was above reproach, and though he quite understood Mr. Dawson meant kindly, yet he could not possibly dismiss a valuable servant at

the dictation of a few idle rustics who, no doubt, fancied they owed him a grudge.

Mr. Dawson was sorry he had spoken and Mr. Lummond tried to forget he had done so, but the information, untrue though he said it was, rankled in Luke's mind as another of "those curses" to which a public man is subject.

In telling Rachel about it, he lost the last ray of comfort he might have had in keeping it to himself, for Rachel, it seemed, had known of the rumour for some time. Why on earth had n't she told him?

Because she did not wish to worry him. That was no answer. He had been told, and he had been worried. If he 'd got to be worried, he would much rather b worried by her than by strangers.

Rachel said she did not agree. She would far sooner somebody else should worry him than worry him herself. But why be worried at all? Why not ascertain the truth and deal with the case accordingly?

"Because it 's simply a try-on with these yokels. They dislike Waters—I 've seen that for some time—and they think they can push me into dismissing him, which is what they want. I can see through their little game. I 'm not quite such a fool as they think."

So Waters stayed, and in less than six weeks, he, having assaulted a gamekeeper, was in the hands of the local police and lodged in Flittenbridge gaol.

Rachel went to see Mrs. Waters. The woman

was in a state bordering on frenzy, and against Luke.

"If harm comes to Alfred," she said, "Mr. Lummond will find two can play at that game. I know a thing or two, and so does Alf. Why, if it were n't for you, Miss—but there, I dar n't go against Alf. He 's missed a mighty fine chance of getting lots of money—and all for you—not him, not him, mind you. He would n't have considered him, not for one moment, if it had n't been for you—and why?"

Rachel put up her hand as though to ward off a blow.

"I don't in the east know what you are talking about, Mrs. Waters. I don't think you know yourself. Remember you are speaking of Mr. Lummond."

"Mr. Lummond!—Yes! He—Mr. Lummond!"

The sneering tone, the malignant gleam in the woman's eyes froze Rachel's blood. Horror of a scene, terror of approaching evil, turned her quite white and made her sit down hastily.

"I thought," she said, "I thought you were fond of Mr. Lummond. I thought you would do anything for him."

"Long as it suited me."

Rachel stared with incredulous eyes. Instead of the former fire and warmth when talking of her nursling, here was a monstrous, cold-blooded selfishness that was abhorrent.

"I came," Rachel said, "because I wanted to

tell you how sorry I am about Waters. I don't want you to tell me anything I—need n't know, but I am terribly sorry about this."

"Well, that 's nothing," said the woman. "Come to that—there 's many a worse thing in the world than taking a bird or a rabbit that don't belong to you—and that 's what some fine gentry will have to find out one of these days. As I said before, if it had n't been for you, Miss——"

"Please don't!" Rachel rose and made for the door. "I can't talk to you if you talk like that. I don't know what you 've got in your mind, but I can't think you quite know what you 're saying."

"I know right enough," said old Mary, "I know what I know—no mistake about that—but the time ain't ripe yet, leastways not unless some harm happens to Alf. He 'll come up afore the magistrates on Tuesday, I suppose, and Mr. Lummond 'll be there!"

"Yes, but he won't sit on that case."

"No? Why not? Afraid?"

"Afraid? Certainly not. You don't know what you 're saying, Mrs. Waters!"

The woman grinned. "You take my advice, Miss, you go home, and you tell Mr. Lummond it 's as much as his place is worth to——"

Rachel opened the door for herself and went out, but the woman's voice followed her down the path.

"Poor dear, poor dear, you came here to be

sorry for me, you did. I 'm a lot sorrier for you, I am, and so 's Alf."

If it had n't been so undignified, Rachel would have put her fingers in her ears and run.

What was it? What was it that seemed always to surround her Luke? What evil, sinister thing crept stealthily up behind him at every step in life? Why was it that she always seemed jealously guarding him from something unseen, but felt?

Often and often the thought crossed her mind to shake herself free not only from a position that had been made intolerable, but also from that atmosphere of evil thoughts which so "assault and hurt the soul." It was these, as much as any facts, that pinioned her wings and kept her earth-bound.

Rachel did not add to Luke's annoyance in the matter by telling him of Mrs. Waters's strange demeanour. She tried to put it from her, and tried to forget and ignore one more thing that added to the ever-increasing weight of difficulties that had to be borne alone.

One idea comforted her—that was her father's ignorance of events as they really were. Had he known, she knew that Luke would be banished from the house—Luke, who still came down as though he had a right to come; who accepted hospitality and kindness, taking everything for granted, without a word of thanks or even a dumb look of gratitude.

She never let her thought dwell on the release such knowledge would bring to her. She only dreaded it because of the added pain it would mean to Luke. What he was going through, what he was suffering, must be beyond anything that she endured. All that was best in Luke, she knew, was up in arms, at the part the worst in him had chosen to play, and yet he could n't free himself. He did not seem to have the strength, the grit, the backbone, to cut himself free from—she put it gently even to herself—the bad company in which he had been caught.

The one streak of light that ran from end to end of their acquaintance was her faith. She never doubted but that Luke would still be a fine man some day. She kept that always before her eyes. She pushed the horrors that had come between them far away out of sight. They were shadows —only shadows that would disappear from the mind as growing pains do from the body of a child developing into a man.

All that she and Luke were going through now were possibly the growing pains of their souls, and when they had both come to the measure of the stature of that standard set for the world, then such pains would cease.

One fact was difficult to hide away—the fact of that irresistible law, the innocent must suffer for the guilty. When she thought of Peter John, when she talked with Giles and Rupert, laughed with them, played with them, she was praying all

the time that they might never know; that those poisoned arrows kept secretly in reserve, might somehow fail of their mark, that a curse for which in her ignorance she had craved, might never come home to roost.

On the following Tuesday justice took its course. Considering the gravity of the offence, Waters was sent to gaol without the option of a fine, and the Flittenbridge poaching affair, with its reported hair-breadth adventures by night, received much serious attention by the local press, and was the one topic discussed by Lummond's constituents.

And before Luke well had time to recover from one extreme annoyance, he was the victim of another.

He received one day at Chambers a missive by post that sent all the blood in his body tearing up into his head and made him almost foam at the mouth with rage. It was posted from Flittenbridge, but the address on the wrapper was printed. The sheet, when spread out, made this astounding announcement in his brilliant, party colours:

LOST, STOLEN, OR STRAYED.

A Conscience.
A Memory (for Good Things).
One Sense of Honour.
One Sense of Justice.
One Sense of Fair Play.
One Sense of Proportion.
Half a Sense of Humour.
A Whole Set of Good Manners
Beside
Three Cardinal Virtues
and
A Right Judgment in Anything
Together with
The Rules of Cricket
as Played by
English Gentlemen.

Any person finding and restoring all, or any, of these items to Luke Lummond, Esq., M. P., Flittenbridge Park in the County of Surrey, before the next General Election, will be gratefully rewarded.

This ugly bit of spleen was carried in Lummond's pocket till such time as he could take advice on the subject—not the advice of a man like Mr. Haskell, but the advice of a "Mrs. F. L."

And after consulting together with libellous, scandalous, slanderous actions in view, after consigning the electors to the hottest corner of the hottest place known to primitive man or woman, after storms and violence, aggravated by inopportune laughs on the part of the fair adviser, after all this bluff and bluster—the paper itself was destroyed and Silence ordered to throw a pall over the affair, that whosoever originated such a document, should not have the gratification of knowing it had been received.

But—without mentioning this pretty publication—Lummond broke to Rachel that his political career was at an end.

She took it quite calmly, without a word, only looking at him steadily.

"Well, are n't you going to treat me to a scene, or don't you care what happens to me?"

. . . . . .

Luke found the way she looked at him most irritating.

"What new game is this? I tell you I won't stand this sort of thing much longer. I——"

She got up, came over to him, and put a hand—intended to have a soothing effect—on his arm.

"Don't bluster, dear, it 's no use, we all know——"

"Know what?" he shook off her hand.

"That beastly paper——"

"You 've seen it?"

"Yes. It was sent to Dad and Tom—I don't know how many others—and it was posted on the gates leading to the village."

"Good Lord!"

"Yes. Can't anything be done, can't you prosecute?"

"How like a woman! Prosecute whom?"

"I don't know, of course, but——"

"But what? Have you any idea? Speak out, for goodness' sake, if you have."

"We 've thought and thought, till we ache with thinking, and no one can imagine except——"

"Except—well? Who has even a faint imagination?"

"I may be wrong—I don't really know—but I——"

"Can't you tell me straight out and skip all this humming and hawing——"

"No. I can't."

"Why not?"

"I think something has broken my nerve. See if Anna will."

"Ah! So he knows, does he?"

"Only what I told him."

After Anna had gravely imparted Rachel's idea, founded on Mrs. Waters's curious behaviour and conversation some few weeks back, he quite expected nothing less than single-handed combat

with a would-be murderer. Luke, however, gave vent to a laugh, hard and devoid of mirth, but intended to convey to his hearer the profound and unmitigated contempt he felt for the aspect presented to his view.

Anna puffed at his pipe, and Luke put his hands in his pockets, bent double, and laughed again.

"That 's how it strikes the merely lay mind," said Anna.

"I 'm afraid the legal mind can't accept it," said Luke. "Old Mary! Why, it 's childish!"

"'He 's missed a chance of getting lots of money,' that 's what she said, talking of Alfred, yet you 'd sooner believe evil of anyone, I expect, than your old Mary."

"I don't say sooner. It 's a horrible thing to believe of anyone, but of all impossible people, I should say Mary is the most impossible. I may be wrong, of course. I shan't take any notice of it. I intend to treat the matter with contempt. You see I don't mean 'to stand' again."

Anna took his pipe out of his mouth and his eyes glowed under their shaggy brows.

"Everybody knows. They 've seen it. Your agent has been here already; the committee——"

"Then they 'll know I don't stoop to notice it."

The older man surveyed the younger one steadily.

"If ever you were justified in making a row, I should think——"

Luke laughed again. "That 's like me," he

said. "When other people would make rows, I don't."

"You can't mean to take that lying down. No man would."

"This man will!"

"Well—I 'm—bust!" said Anna.

And Luke went out with the intention of finding Rachel and saying all the things to her that he would not dare to say to old Mary. Fortunately he failed in his quest.

Mr. Wilton: "After all there is no education like adversity 'If it would only cease at the right time,' said Endymion."

Lord Beaconsfield.

CHAPTER XXXI

A.D. VERSUS B.C.

THE garden seemed empty and deserted of human kind.

The sun was shining; the shadows were beginning to lengthen; the flowers were scenting the air; and tiny ripples played on the surface of the water, as though to entice the dragon-fly haunting the reeds and rushes, home of its former existence.

Mrs. Jack stepped out of a window, shading her eyes with her hand. She strolled down a broad walk where the trees met overhead, and sat on a bank of moss, facing the house and the garden and the pond.

She was knitting a stocking automatically and every now and then lifting her head, breathing up the air as though it were something good and unusual.

She must have sat there for half an hour undisturbed, when a man's form appeared in the distance. She thought it was Tom and opened her mouth to call, then closed it again, seeing that it was not Tom but Luke. He was going towards

his house and Rose thought at first she would let him go; then she thought she would like a talk with her future brother-in-law and try to get to know him better. So she called, "Coo-ee!"

The man turned and stood still. She called again, waving her stocking leg to indicate her whereabouts.

Luke came up to her frowning.

"That 's a very penetrating family catcall," he said, as he sat down beside her.

She answered cheerfully, "Yes, is n't it? The surest way of attracting anyone's attention. And how is the world treating you, Master Lummond?"

"Oh, much the same as usual. Frightfully stuffy in London!"

"Makes it all the nicer to come down here then," said Rose, regarding him somewhat critically.

"Appalling in the train. We had an accident too—ran off the line."

"No! Anybody hurt?"

"I don't think so, but it was only just the other side of the junction, so I got out and walked."

"Luke, fancy taking it so quietly! I should be in a fearful flutter. Are you sure nobody was hurt?"

"I can't be sure, of course, but I don't think so. A lot of silly women took to screaming, as they always do. Fortunately, I was in a carriage by myself, so I just opened the door and walked out. I hate a crowd, and a travelling crowd is worse than any other."

Rose went on knitting in silence, but her eyes were fixed on Luke, as though she would read what lay behind his speech.

Presently he said, "I wonder if I can have some fruit?"

"I 'm sure you can. Shall we send a gardener or——"

"No. I 'll go and choose my own." He got up and moved away a few yards, thereby intercepting a man with a basket on his way to the house.

Luke captured the basket and brought it back to the tree. When he was refreshed and presumably feeling better, he asked,

"Where 's Rachel?"

"Gone out driving, paying calls with my mother."

"Lord!" said Master Lummond. "Of all the stupid ways of spending an afternoon, I must say that appears to me quite the stupidest!"

Rose laughed. "If you belong to a civilised tribe, you must conform to its rules. Our tribe has always paid calls. Perhaps yours has n't!"

Luke answered crustily, "I don't belong to any tribe. I 'm not an Israelite, if that 's what you mean."

Rose dropped her stocking in her lap and laughed with real enjoyment.

"My dear boy! You can't be feeling well."

"Quite well, thank you. I notice whenever anyone disagrees with a Cremayne, it 's always

supposed the wretched he or she who disagrees must *primâ facie* be physically or mentally deficient."

He flung himself backwards full length on the grass with his hands clasped behind his head.

Mrs. Jack picked up her stocking again and went on knitting but there was a slight arch to her eyebrows that had not been there before.

Presently she said, "Tell me what you are interested in? I feel I know you so little really. What is your hobby, or hobbies, if you 've got several?"

Luke shook his head, "I 've no time for hobbies."

"No? Well, Rachel has so many, I don't suppose it matters. You 'll have as much as you can do in sharing hers, I expect. By the way, if you want to buy something for the house that will please her, I can tell you of——"

"No, thanks."

"You don't know what it is yet!"

"No, but I 'm sure it 's a bargain."

She laughed. "It is that. Don't you like bargains?"

He moved his head sideways without speaking.

"You see my bargain could combine a birthday present for her next week and an ornament for your house next year."

"Why do you say next year? Has Rachel told you next year?"

"Dear, no! She seems quite vague on the

subject. I can tell you of something else she would like for her bir——"

Luke sat up.

"Nothing amuses me more," he said bitterly, "than the way people try to get me to do things. If I want to give Rachel a present, I 'm quite capable of choosing something myself. As a matter of fact, I 'm waiting till I see something I really like."

"Sorry," said Rose, "I thought you might want to give her something she would really like, and I could perhaps help you by——"

"I know, it 's very kind. People always seem to be wanting to help me."

"They probably think they are giving you a light."

"Should n't wonder. That 's why it amuses me so to leave them in the dark."

Rose laughed and laughed.

"As a brother-in-law, I think you very funny, but as a husband, I should find you wildly irritating!"

"Oh! we should fight from the start," he said.

"Fight? You don't honestly mean that you would ever think of fighting the woman you married!"

"Rather! You know the old saying,

"'A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree,
The more you beat them, the better they be.'"

The woman who was temporarily this man's

companion shrank visibly into herself. Her eyes only grew larger and more fixed upon him.

"That sort of adage belonged to B.C."

"I see quite enough in my profession," Luke said quietly, "to know that in nine cases out of ten it still works remarkably well in A.D."

Rose flung out her hands towards him, a bright patch of colour in either cheek.

"Then give it up!" she said. "No profession is worth following if it gives you a low idea of human nature."

Luke turned to her, smiling pleasantly as if to reassure her.

"It is n't only the law," he said. "It 's everywhere, all round me. I see it wherever I go. It 's just 'cupboard love' with women as it is with children and dogs. It 's gain with them. Nothing on earth but gain. Please them, and they fawn upon you. Beat them, metaphorically speaking, and I 've seen them lick your boots."

"Where—can—you have been?"

The knitting needles lay idle in the stocking. The knitter clasped her fingers under her chin.

Silence brooded over them both.

Mrs. Cremayne presently came walking down the path, her dress making a soft, swishing sound at the side where she did not hold it up.

"What a nice, shady spot you 've chosen! Well, Luke! Don't move, my dear; it seems such an effort to you."

He rose, nevertheless, with an elaborate air of polite fatigue.

"You 'd like me to get you a chair, I expect?"

"Not if it 's a trouble. Tell Bolton to bring one and say we 'll have tea out here, will you?"

Mother and daughter watched him. The same thought was in the mind of each, but a generation divided them, and each feared to speak.

The chair arrived, followed by tea, followed by the family. There was much desultory conversation, a certain amount of ragging, and not a little laughter. Luke maintained a stolid and stupid silence, with an amazing air of superiority. Rachel feigned to ignore it by being extra gay and thereby distracting attention from him.

"We saw the Fitz-Mullins this afternoon," she said, in a general way." He——"

"Hough! That must have been a treat!"

She laughed. "For him or for me?"

"Well, I can hardly suppose you 'd go out of your way to see a bounder like that."

"No. He bounded over the hedge to see us—most beautifully, did n't he, Mother? He nearly fell head first into our laps and was very amusing."

"Glad to hear it. I can't say Irish forms of wit ever amuse me. I feel more inclined to cry at the sadness of it."

Rachel laid her hand on Master Lummond's arm. "You let me talk now. I 've got such lots to say and then we will go for a walk. Hullo, look at Tom!"

Tom came up to the table with a bandage on one of his hands. "Sorry to say there 's been an accident," he said. "Train ran off the line just before the junction. Two little kiddies were rather hurt. No, I 'm all right, Mater—only a scratch. I happened to be handy, so was able to help. Yes, we got the children off to the hospital, but the poor mother was nearly distracted. Nobody else was seriously damaged; so they 've all gone on."

Lummond listening caught Mrs. Jack's eyes fixed on him. He stood up. "Come on Rachel. I hate horrors. Let 's go for a walk."

"Who were they, Tom, the children, I mean?"

"Very uncommon name, my dear! They were called Brown and were coming on a visit to some relations other side of Dister—quite poor. I got the woman a lodging and sent a wire for her, so they are all right to-night."

"You are a brick. Would you like to send round the hat?"

Tom pulled off his "straw" and laid it on the table. "All contributions thankfully acknowledged," he said, and took a bite of cake.

The General pulled some coins from his pocket. His wife bent towards him. "Five shillings for me, dear, please. I have n't got my purse."

"And half a crown for me on account," said Rose nodding.

Luke put his hand through Rachel's arm. "Do come," he said, and drew her away.

"Put in something for both of us first," she whispered, "will you? I 'll faithfully pay you!"

"Have n't any change; besides, why should I pay? If I had been hurt, they would n't have paid for me!"

"Well, as a thank-offering, then, that you were n't hurt," said the woman.

"Rot!" said the man.

The numbers round the table dwindled, and presently the table itself disappeared. Only Tom and his elder sister were left together. He was smoking; she was still knitting. The eyes of both travelled along the terrace, where the Master of the house, with one hand through his wife's arm, was "spudding" with the other at an imaginary weed.

"Tom!"

"M-m."

"I think he 's intolerable!"

"Poor chap!"

"Oh, it 's all very well to say, 'Poor chap'! Do you know he came down by that train? Never found out if anybody was hurt and never offered to help; just walked off by himself because a woman's screams annoyed him."

"Hum!"

"He 's been bitter and sour for a long time. Now he 's malignant! Yes, really. How Rachel can be so blind, I cannot imagine! He 's absolutely impossible!"

"He 's going through a pretty bad time I expect."

"Bad time! That 's no reason why he should give us a bad time."

"No, but the way of transgressors is hard, we 've always heard."

"I suppose it 's all that beastly woman, poor Peter John's wife?"

"Brought it to a head, no doubt."

"Did you ever see her?"

"Yes. Once. A good-looking she-devil! I thought she was going to be clever, but she 's disappointed me."

"How, Tom?"

"Well," Tom blew some smoke into the air, "I thought she was capable of teaching our friend a few little things he ought to know; but she is n't. Also—but this mind you is rather Machiavellian—I rather hoped she might induce Master Lummond to think his world well lost for love of her; if so, the better for Peter John and for our dear sister."

"You wanted—you hoped—he would run away with her, or what?'

"I thought it might n't be a bad scheme. I was quite prepared to wire to India and see the old bird through the D. C."

"Tom, how disgusting it all is! And what 's specially disappointed you?"

"The lady 's on the wane! She 's a blighting failure!"

"You don't say so! How do you know?"

The man shivered. "It 's getting cold. Come

along and we 'll go for a jog-trot down the drive. He took her some 'snap-dragon' last week. Snap-dragon for a Lady-love! Oh, my stars and garters! Now then, take my arm. Keep step to the tune the old cow died of——

'Mrs. Effell is on the wane,
On the wane, on the wane.
Mrs. Effell is on the wane,
Purple peas in posies.

'Mrs. Effell is on the wane,
On the wane, on the wane.
Mrs. Effell is on the wane
Blighted stable roses
Bla-highted stable Ra-au-sies!' "

CHAPTER XXXII

A GAME OF PATIENCE

IN the studio once more Rachel was standing before a finished piece of work.

The smallest thing she had done, and the best, because the most original, had been cast in plaster and was now waiting commendation or condemnation from the master's eye.

Rachel would not look at Anna. She stood in silence, contemplating her handiwork. Anna stood in silence beside her.

Presently he walked round and surveyed the other side. He touched the top of the pedestal and watched it slowly revolve before him.

As it came to a standstill, he looked across at Rachel and nodded once.

Not a word, not another glance at her.

She kept her eyes on his face. He made the thing revolve again, nodded again, and said, "Good. Good. Very good!"

The subject of admiration was "A Game of Patience," and the two figures, quarter life-size, sitting either side of a table, were Robert Haskell and his wife in miniature.

"No fault, Anna?"

"No fault, Rachel."

"But a weakness? I 'm not sure I 've made him strong enough."

"Yes. He 's quite strong enough."

"Is she too delicate—too fragile?"

"No. The contrast is excellent. The idea, the carrying out, the whole scheme do you great credit."

"Oh, Anna!"

She sank limply into a chair, her hands grasping the arms.

"This is the sort of moment in which I should like to die!"

Anna wiped a little dust from the hem of Mrs. Haskell's gown where it lay in folds on the floor; then he passed a finger lovingly over Robert.

"The back of his head is inimitable! I 'd know it anywhere. You 're a pupil to be proud of."

"Anna, dear, I shall cry!"

"Do," he said. "We ought to celebrate the event. Let me help," and he patted her soothingly on the shoulder.

Anna talked of the work from every point of view, and about the packing of it, saying he should do it himself; then understood from the tearful voice that Luke was down to-day and must see it first, so he passed on to the hope that if the Haskells were pleased, they would be able to get her orders, whereupon Rachel wiped away the remaining tear and laughed. She did not think

that mattered a bit. She did not care the least about the money part.

"No," said Anna. "But if the world is to think well of you, the world must know your things are worth so much £. s. d. Common and vulgar, I know, but a fact."

Rachel said she was quite content to feel he was pleased and one or two others. She did n't care about the world.

"If you want to take up art seriously, my dear, you must show that it 's worth money; otherwise your most beautiful studies will be considered waste of time!"

"Only by the ignorant!"

"But the ignorant count; they count, my child. Ah! here comes Lummond!"

"I 'm sorry I could n't get here sooner. I had a most worrying time—everything at sixes and sevens. How are you, Rachel?— All right?— Morning, Anna. What a stuffy day, is n't it? I feel tired to death. What was it you wanted me to see?"

He was standing close to the thing they wanted him to see, with his eyes fixed vacantly on it while he was talking. When Anna said, "That," and Rachel said, "This," he frowned.

"I thought I was wanted for the unveiling of a statue at least!"

"Do you like it, Luke? Of course it 's very tiny——"

"Yes. It looks all right. Only nobody, my

dear, would play cards in the middle of a lot of work like that."

Rachel laughed. "I suppose they would n't. It 's meant to be sort of symbolical, you see."

"Is it? Could you imagine me clearing my writing-table for——"

"No, Luke, I could n't. But never mind the table. What do you think of the likenesses?"

"Oh, they 're all right, but it 's a mad idea, is n't it, Anna? I thought you were going to do a large bust."

"Busts are so commonplace."

"When are you going to do me, now? I 'm tired of seeing everybody else immortalised. I want to see myself."

"I don't think you 'd like it if I did you."

"Never mind, I 'd like to see your idea of me. It would interest me enormously."

"I 'll try some day. Do you think the Haskells will like my little present?"

"Don't know, can't say. Is it a present? I thought you said something about getting orders."

"Only by-and-bye—if I 'm a success. It 's a wedding present—you know I told you—for their tenth anniversary."

"So you did. You wanted me to join in something, did n't you?"

"Yes, but you did not seem inclined, though they 've been so good to us both."

Luke laughed.

"My dear, they 're much more your friends than

mine." Then turning to Anna, who was lazily drawing something at the table in charcoal, "'Fraid I don't share this family's mania for present-giving," he said. "It 's a craze that strikes me as most unnecessary."

"Hum," said Anna. "But that 's a good bit of work she 's done there."

"Is it? I fear I 'm very ignorant. I don't understand this sort of gimcrack. I 'm a Philistine, I expect—always was, you know. By the way, you won't be able to have my wife as a model by-and-bye. I don't like it now, but of course I 've no authority yet."

They both laughed at the marital tone.

"I mean it, you know. I 'm going to put my foot down in lots of ways. Not sure that I shall let you do any of this sort of thing."

"She will want a studio for it," Anna said.

"Then that settles it. I 'm certainly not going to run to a studio; 't would be a frightful expense."

"But if it 's going to amuse me all the time you are out, Lu, and away——"

"Very expensive thing, a studio in London—What? Fifty or sixty pounds a year? Do you hear that? Do you think I 'm going to spend fifty or sixty pounds a year on something that is n't any good to me?"

"And how much, my dear Sir, does a man's office cost, or chambers, or whatever he has?"

"That 's quite a different thing. He does n't

have that to amuse him. It 's part of his work and helps bring in the money."

"Perhaps mine would do that."

"Oh! then that would be a different story. It 's one thing to run art for art's sake, and quite another thing if it 's going to bring grist to the mill. Is n't it, Anna?"

"Quite," said Anna. "Quite," still roughing in an outline. "Now I think we might help pack the treasure, if——"

"Well, ta-ta. I 'm no good at packing, so I may as well depart. So glad you 've let me off giving a present! Sure they don't want one!"

Oh-h! How icy, icy cold, the studio felt—icy, icy cold!

Rachel took a wisp of hay and wound it slowly round Mr. Haskell's leg. Anna whistled softly, wiping Mrs. Haskell's face.

"That 's the good," he said presently, "of the artistic mind meeting the realistic mind in daily contact—you each get ideas from the other."

Rachel smiled.

"How nice of you, Anna! One is so apt to forget the beam in one's own eye!"

Anna nodded.

"The artistic eye is very comprehensive."

She sighed.

"I wish he 'd noticed their attitudes."

"He noticed the work pushed to one side."

"Yes, that would strike him."

"You want it to strike him."

"I thought a brief on the edge of the table, with the scrap-basket yawning below, would have excited comment!"

"I expect he put great strain on himself to resist saying how obviously silly it was!"

"Do you, Anna? I hope Mr. Haskell won't."

"Mr. Haskell will be sorry that Mrs. Haskell's work is being spoilt by the cat."

Then they wound and stuffed in silence.

Anna broke it presently with, "If you can't have a studio, I should n't give up modelling. It 's a great safety valve."

"No, I don't feel I could."

"You can do a lot in a room—bathroom for choice."

"Yes. I wonder why women to-day want safety valves. In old days they seem to have been so content to——"

"To what?"

"Well, I don't know—to submit, I think."

"The Victorian Age produced the submissive woman."

"People's mothers and grandmothers all seem to have submitted to the inevitable."

"If you have n't got it in you to excel in anything else, you had better excel in submission."

"Oh! you think they could n't excel in anything else?"

"Presumably not. If there had been in them anything stronger it would have been bound to come out."

"Nothing stronger than submission! Anna, how very interesting! Do you think what is in us is always bound to come out?"

"Of course."

"I did n't know I had modelling instincts in me!"

"Not until you were pushed. Then, when you took a bit of clay in your hands, you krew. People rarely do their best until they are pushed."

"And then, whatever is in you gets pushed to the front?"

"Yes. With you, as with all artistic temperaments, it 's the creative power. If you 'd married and had children, you might never have modelled. As it is, the instinct has forced you to have brain children like these—" He touched Mr. and Mrs. Haskell on the head.

"Or a devil like that!"

" That shows the variety of which you are capable. It 's only people with one idea between them who produce a progeny all exactly alike."

Rachel laughed and paused in her work to lean against the table. Her eye fell on the charcoal drawings. She looked at them; frowned; then looked across at Anna, shaking with internal mirth.

The drawing was a double cartoon. On one side of the centre line was a representation of herself as a child, very busy planting in a garden. Her small tools were all round her, and she was giving the final pat to a little mound of earth.

On the other, the mound of earth had produced a huge and enormous thistle, with Lummond's face winking and smiling out of the middle. Some four-legged things were hee-hawing in the distance, and in the foreground Rachel, still as a child, was kneeling with clasped hands and eyes screwed tight shut. Underneath were the words, "Oh Lord, PLEASE let it be a grape!"

"That's your attitude exactly," Anna said, "towards life in general—and Lummond in particular."

Rachel went on laughing to herself. "Is it? One never knows. I suppose I'm turning away my head not to see the glory about to be revealed."

"You are shutting your eyes, my dear, to a fact."

"I do want him to be a grape," she said doggedly, "and I believe he will be some day."

Anna nodded, the sort of nod that betokened absence of inspiration. Then he said, "I've heard somewhere that 'men grow very like thorns in their anxiety to bear grapes.'"

"If one has sufficient faith and patience, never allowing even to oneself that anything but good is ultimately possible, don't you believe, Anna, that it must come?"

But Anna did not answer.

"Say something, Anna."

"I am gradually being forced to believe what I see," Anna said slowly, "that in this case, your methods only produce a fatter thistle."

They went on packing in silence, and one tear at least was packed into the Haskells' case.

"As we are on the subject," Anna said stolidly and without looking at her, "may I ask whether you still mean to marry him?"

"Yes."

"Though you know you can't make him happy!"

"Anna!"

"And you know he can't make you happy!"

"But——"

"Has he ever in his life made anybody happy? Is he first of all happy himself? Does he make his relations happy?"

"He says they 're no good."

"Why are they no good?"

"I don't know. If ever I ask anything about them, he always dismisses them with that remark. Of course, if he 'd ever had brothers and sisters——"

" They 'd have been 'no good'—even as we are 'no good,' as Flittenbridge is 'no good,' as the neighbours round are 'no good,' as people like Robert Haskell and the Bishop himself are 'no good,' as his wife—to her cost—will find some day that she—too, is 'no good.' "

Rachel sat back on the floor, her hands clasped tight under her chin; then she bowed her head lower. Anna knew that she was crying.

His voice was very low, and sympathy sounded through his words, "You love him and you want to help him, but he won't let you. You can't do

it against his will. You can bring Love and Success and Happiness to his door, as you have already done, but unless he gives them welcome you 've no right to force an entry."

"Tell me," Rachel said, as she had often said before, "tell me what I can do?"

"If you persist in going through with this engagement, you can take a leaf out of his own book; you can learn from him that just as you and all of us are powerless to make him happy unless he acquiesces in being happy, so he can have no power to make you miserable unless you acquiesce in being miserable."

Rachel leaned on the packing case and gazed across at the old philosopher. "Say that again, will you? I know it 's something splendid, but I don't seem able to take it in at once."

Anna repeated it, adding, "It is n't mine. I don't know where I met it, but I 'm sure I met it somewhere. Now, forgive me my impertinence." He held out his hand across the hay and straw. Rachel put hers into it, saying slowly,

"If he refuses to let me make him happy, I also can refuse to let him make me miserable. Is that right, Anna? Thank you very, very much indeed."

Anna lifted her fingers to his lips and kissed them.

She left presently when all was finished, with the label written and attached, and she went on through the gardens out into the Park to have a "think" by herself.

In spite of all the things said to her by Anna and other people, two thoughts upreared their heads in these days above all the other thoughts—two, which fought and warred against each other, claiming the first place. The one was Luke Lummond; the other—she never said the name even to herself—the other was "the other one."

And while she strove and strove to keep her affections clinging to "the one," she was conscious all the time that he had the power to throw them back so that they seemed to rebound on herself. And "the other" had the power of claiming them —even against her will. She tried to fight against it; she tried not to think of him save as Ruth's devoted husband; she told herself a dozen times a day that she was a "foolish Virgin"; but there it was. "The other one" filled up all the place that she had long kept swept and garnished for "the one." And she seemed powerless to turn him out. That was the most extraordinary part of the matter,—that she had tried, that she had prayed, that she had destroyed every little outward thing that could keep memory alive. She was as drastic in her measures with herself as she would be with another, and yet, and yet, there he was, claiming dominion just the same.

"Don't let me care like this, but help me to care as I want to care," thus she prayed nightly with weeping.

Was this struggle all due to that momentary physical touch a while ago, when she had put out

a finger and met the grip of two arms? Just because she was human, perhaps it was that, when added to all the other things of the heart and the mind and the soul.

"Well, sister mine!"

She stopped, dazed by the evening sunlight and by the sudden call back to earth.

"I did n't see you."

"No, so I observed. What preoccupation have you got now?"

"Oh, I don't know. My 'Game of Patience' is packed, finished, ready to go."

"Good! I 'd like to see them open it."

"So would I, Tom. A fly on the wall—I wonder if they 'll like it."

"You don't do anything of the sort. You know they 'll go crazy over it! It 's simply ripping—the best thing you 've ever done."

"I 've got an order, Tom."

"What!"

"Sir Victor has asked me to do Mary, head and shoulders, with Miss Winyon cuddled into her neck!"

"No! Can you do it?"

She nodded. "Try. Is n't it nice of him?"

Tom sat musing, cross-legged on the log, and Rachel, with artist's eyes, marked how dark were the forms of the birds flying against the light.

Presently he looked at her and said, "I want to ask you something. Do you mind telling me—

just once for all. Are you going to stick to Lummond for ever?"

"I hope so. I mean to. Why?"

"I only wanted it on your own authority. I said you meant to, on mine, and it was n't believed."

"Who did 'nt believe?"

"Somebody who did n't want to."

"Who was it, Tom?"

He bent down and whispered a name softly.

"H'm. That 'boy in the Blues,' as we used to call him?"

"He is n't in the Blues any longer. His father 's dead, and he 's settling down—or wants to. He could n't believe you were still engaged to Lummond."

"Well, I am," Rachel said. "And always shall be—unless he breaks the engagement."

" Then it 's no use?"

"No, it 's no use, Tom, and I 'm getting cold."

"Poor chap!" He got up and took Rachel's arm, walking on.

Then Rachel probed.

" There 's something, now, I want to know very much, and it 's such an odd thing I can't ask just anybody, but I think you might tell me. Supposing I married, and a man—another man, of course—got to like me very much—very, very much, Tom, would it make him deteriorate?"

Tom frowned with distaste, but he said, "I don't see why it should."

"Well, that 's all. That 's just what I wanted to know."

Rachel felt she ended tamely, but she had got her answer, so refrained from continuing.

"Why should it?"

"I don't know. It always does—with other people. I wondered if it would with me."

"I don't think it always does."

"Always, Tom. A man seems to be no good to anybody once that sort of thing begins. He goes down and down and down, but I can't think that he need——"

Tom did not answer, but chipped at the bar of the gate with his stick, whistling under his breath.

"I 'm a nice woman," Rachel sailed along the line of her own ideas, "at least I 'm supposed to be a nice woman, and I can't see that liking a nice woman can ever possibly make a man go under."

"It does n't—quite the reverse. It probably pulls him up to heights he 'd never dreamed."

Then Rachel could have bitten out her tongue.

I have taken your picture
Out of the frame,
And out of my prayers
I have taken your name.
I have crumpled your letters
Right into the flame.
And yet—in my heart you are there
Just the same!
Does "le bon Dieu," I wonder,
Commend me or blame?

Rose Henniker Heaton.

CHAPTER XXXIII

SUFFERING AND LOSS

WHEN, in a former day a certain Mrs. Felix Lorraine mixed that tumbler of hock and seltzer for Vivian Grey, tired from his drive after their day out, he rejected it because . . . leaning on the mantelpiece, with his eyes vacantly gazing on the looking-glass . . . he distinctly beheld Mrs. Felix Lorraine open a small silver box, and throw some powder into the tumbler which she was preparing for him. . . . A sickness came over him, and ere he could recover himself his Hebe tapped him on the shoulder . . .

"Here drink, drink while it is effervescent."

"I cannot drink," said Vivian, "I am not thirsty; I am too hot; I am anything——"

. . . He sought his chamber for relief. . . . He flung himself upon his bed, and felt for a moment as if he had quaffed the poisoned draught so lately offered.

"Poison! O God! O God! Away with all fear. . . . And now, thou female fiend! the battle

is to the strongest; and I see right well that the struggle between two such spirits will be a long and a fearful one——"

So much for Vivian Grey and a lady of the type of Mrs. Felix Lorraine.

But Mr. Lummond was not so lucky. He, too, had had his day out; he, too, was tired and weary; for him, too, a poisoned draught had been prepared; but his eyes were blinded, and what his Hebe offered Luke accepted.

The poison worked in his veins and flowed in his blood. He suffered such extreme inflammation from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot that to others he appeared to be a totally different man. Yet he considered and constantly affirmed that the change was not in himself but in the rest of the world.

He, too, many a time flung himself on his bed, but he got no relief for his mind. He sought it, then, in action, and one evening in his rooms he sat facing the position.

Behind him, Love, Honour, Happiness. These he had torn to shreds as things of no account.

In front of him, Peter John. Under his hand, a letter from that devil of a woman old Mary, trying to blackmail him.

Blackmail him!

Where did it all come from, this accumulation of misery?

He put out his hand and took up one of the many papers with which his table was strewn.

"DEAR LUKE,

"I believe you will be glad to hear that my husband is making arrangements for coming home shortly.

"Yours,

"A. N. EFFELL."

This looked simple enough to the ordinary reader, but Luke knew there was devilish cruelty behind it.

He took up another, from his agent. He read it through and the dissatisfaction in the letter was still further reflected in his face. His attendance was requested at a meeting of the Committee to be held the following week on account of some unpleasing rumours regarding him personally, as well as on account of his remarks on the Nonconformist conscience, which had seemingly given great offence to a fair portion of his constituents.

This would have been considerably annoying at any time, but coming now, it seemed the last straw on a back already too heavily burdened.

He took up a third, old Mary's. It was fiendish —absolutely fiendish. When he remembered the terms on which they had been, the reason for his confidence in her, the cause for this spiteful attack seemed to him wholly inadequate.

Old Mary hinted darkly at a secret concerning his birth of which she had all along had knowledge. This secret she had guarded with jealous care from all the world save Alf, but now that Mr.

Lummond had failed to protect her Alf, she felt the insecurity of her own position, that any day Mr. Lummond might round on her also, and, therefore, she was bound henceforward to protect herself.

If Mr. Lummond liked to pay her to keep his secret, that secret should be kept and should go down with her to the grave, but if Mr. Lummond disregarded her words, he would find in the end that he would have to pay, but the cost would be beyond that of which he could form any idea.

In itself and taken alone, when in good health and spirits, Lummond knew he could have dealt with old Mary and her secret in a way that was now rendered impossible, because he was no longer a free man. He was living in the grip of a deadly fear; and every one of these letters, every idle rumour, almost every stranger he met seemed capable of bursting the terror of some unknown possibility.

Luke sat far on into the night, trying to find a way out of his difficulties, and towards morning by the help of the devil he had arranged the programme for his more immediate future.

First he would announce his resignation to his Committee, and then he would apply for the Chiltern Hundreds. That would release him from a political life. Then he would give notice to Robert Haskell about his room at Chambers with his intention of giving up the bar. He had had a chance of going on the Stock Exchange, and if not

too late, he would take it, and work as he had never worked before, and make money hand over fist, and then he could pay his way.

The Waterses must be paid—but it would be as pensioners. So long as they held their tongues about him and his affairs, so long as they ceased from reminding him of their irritating existence, so long should they receive a pension paid quarterly.

With the dismissal of the Waterses came the difficulties of Flittenbridge generally and the Manor House in particular. He should not live there again; the place had not really suited him; it was a foolish idea of Rachel's; and he had shewn a weakness in listening to her. Therefore he would seek another tenant, or—a whisper in his ear——

"Why not sell?"

He disregarded the whisper at first; later on, to shew how strong he was, he wrote a letter to his lawyers on the subject which was private and confidential.

There were other people also to be paid—in kind. Of these he could not rid himself quite so easily: men who in some way or another had "scored" off him; "friends" he had met with Mrs. Effell—women with a sense of honour that matched his own, who had made things easy for him and thereby gained a passing favour.

"The rest" was comprised in the next line——

"His own marriage."

The announcement of his immediate marriage to

Rachel Cremayne would silence all tongues and would enable the return of Peter John to be shorn of all terror or disaster for himself.

Once married to Rachel, he would be safe; for whatever Peter John's suspicions of his own wife might be, Lummond knew the man would never bring trouble on a daughter of the house that had befriended him in his youth. Thus the reason of the slight attention necessary to the few lines of his late beloved.

He had thought of a scheme that would make his way safe.

By the time he had got all this in train he was very, very tired. Only the letter to Rachel asking her to see him remained to be written; the others were lying ready for post. The dawn was breaking, and he had not closed his eyes.

He wrote a few lines, paused, and searched for the last note he had had from her. He read it through, and felt as though his weary spirit tried to respond to the gentle tone—tried, but failed, because he was now conscious that in his humiliation the worst had befallen,—his judgment had been taken away.

He started another letter under this softening influence, and as he wrote, it seemed as if the powers of good and evil were warring in mortal combat round him.

The pen slipped from his hand into the ink, and he left it there. His head went down on to his folded arms, for he was tired—so very tired.

He longed at that moment for but one thing—Rachel's presence, to feel Rachel's hand on his shoulder, to hear Rachel's voice saying, "It 's all right, dear. It 's quite all right."

He knew she would say that—she had said it so often about other things. His mind wandered to trifles—to mud stains long ago on a white carpet, and to the sound of Mrs. Cremayne's voice coming near; to his own paralysed attitude giving way to relief as he saw a brush in Rachel's hand whisking the marks away; to things upset or broken, by him, reinstated or mended by her; to damage done and quickly repaired, because Love's eyes were watching always to protect him. And now—this whole miserable business. Of course he must clear it up himself. That was only fair—he could not expect Rachel to do it. He would not ask her. He could not ask her, but oh, the sense of relief in the bare thought of relinquishing himself and his muddles to somebody who would understand!

For a few moments he abandoned himself to the imagined nearness of Rachel Cremayne. He fancied her arms were about him and her hair was touching his hair, and there was no forgiveness in her words, nor yet in her eyes, not even in her smile. He could n't bear that—a woman with a forgiving smile would be intolerable to any man needing forgiveness. Rachel knew that, as she knew so many things. In her face, as he then saw it there was only gladness; in her eyes, in her voice, in her smile, in her touch, only gladness, because

there was nothing to forgive. It had all been blotted out.

He raised his head and saw the day struggling through the gaps in the curtains. He must finish that letter, and then he would go to bed. He tore up what he had begun and wrote afresh,

"DARLING RACHEL,

"Will you let me come and see you? I want to have a long talk.

"Always yours if you 'll let me.

"LU."

The clash and clang of war seemed over, and Luke lay down to sleep like a child—and like a child he dreamed. Is it only when some Queen of Darkness has finished her work that an Angel of Light has a chance to begin?

He dreamed he was at school again—a little boy at a village school and sitting next a little girl in a pinafore.

And they were both doing sums on their slates. And the little girl who was Rachel did her sum wrong every time, but she kept her slate clean; and the little boy, who was Luke himself, did his sum always right, but his slate was very dirty. And the little boy mocked the little girl because she could not do her sum right, and the little girl made a face and said "kee!" in a most disgusting manner every time she saw his dirty slate.

So the little boy, Luke, set to work to lick his slate

where it was dirty all round the place where the sum was done right; and he licked and he licked, and the more he licked, the greasier and slimier grew the part that ought to be clean. And the little girl, Rachel, tried and tried to prove her sum right, and it still came wrong every time; but she went on trying, and then when she looked at Luke and saw what he was doing and how green his slate was getting, she said again,

"Oh, kee!" as though she was sick.

Then a voice from somewhere said, "Teacher' s coming," and the little boy felt a great thump of fear in his heart, and he nudged the little girl, Rachel, and said, "How did you get your slate clean, quick?"

"I cried," said the little girl, Rachel, "and it came quite clean directly."

"Pooh," said the little boy, Luke. "How like a girl! A lick 's just as good as a tear."

And he went on with his own way of doing things till the teacher came quite close.

Then he nudged Rachel again and said, "How did you cry, tell me quick?"

But the teacher was looking at the little girl's sum and was laying his hand on her head, so that she never heard the little boy, Luke. She was smiling and looking so happy, though her sum was wrong, that the little boy, Luke, gave one awful gulp and his slate smashed to bits on the floor and he cried and cried, because it was too late then to clean his slate with his tears.

The crash was so terrific it woke him—to find his can of shaving water had been knocked against the basin, and "teacher" was his man telling him it was time to get up.

And between the little letter he wrote in melting mood and the answer he received, something happened that made a golden opportunity for Lummond, but which he failed to grasp because h s eyes were blinded so that he could not see.

Rachel was spending the day with her dearest friend. They had lunched together, motored together, discoursed together, and together had shared a secret—two secrets—one concerning Robert and one concerning Ruth.

"I 'm not going to tell you what it is," Ruth said, smiling, "because it 's not made public yet. You 'll probably see it in the *Times* to-morrow; but it 's something very, very nice for Robert!"

"I know," Rachel said coolly. "He's going to be made a judge—we always said so."

"My dear, do you know his age?"

"Is n't he old enough? That does n't matter nowadays. They are making very young bishops, why should n't they make young judges? Mr. Justice Haskell! Do you like the sound?"

"Not particularly—it has a touch of finality. If he were a judge now, he could n't be more than a judge in twenty years; besides, it would mean giving up politics."

"And you don't want him to do that. Oh—

then—Ruth! Not Solicitor General? Not the new Solicitor General? Dad wondered this morning who it would be, and suggested Mr. Haskell. Is it that?"

Ruth smiled, shaking her head. "I 'm not going to tell you. I 'm not going to tell you a thing. You 'll see it all in the papers to-morrow."

"You might just tell me he 's not going to be Solicitor General, then I won't worry."

But Ruth was obdurate. "Now, listen to my surprise. I can walk—by myself—without an arm, or a stick, or any such thing. In fact, if needs be, I can run! See? I can get off the sofa, —no, don't help me, and I am going to stroll out on to the landing to-night, like this!"

She did it, and laughed at Rachel's anxiety and her own success.

Twice did she send Rachel down below to see the effect as Robert would see it when he returned that evening.

Rachel stood on the mat, looking up, as Robert always looked up, and Ruth stood by the banisters looking down.

"Here—or there? Which is best, Rachel? I shall put on a white gown, so there 's no fear of not catching his eye."

"There! Just where you are," Rachel said, slowly ascending the staircase. "I wish I could hear his stampede!"

Ruth laughed with her handkerchief to her mouth.

Rachel gave her an arm back into the room. "Don't overdo it," she said, "you look rather white even now. Sit down and be an invalid till he comes."

By-and-bye Rachel had to leave to catch her train, and Ruth promised to write later and say how the surprise had gone off.

Rachel found Luke's little note waiting for her, having come by the second post during her absence, and she answered it by telegram with, "Come whenever you like." This arrived too late for him to go down that night, and with the morning came the brief announcement in the papers which might have been of so much help to him had he recognised and known how to seize the psychological moment.

The spell of dreams and visions was on him still, when his eye fell on the words, "Death of Mrs. Haskell."

"We regret to have to announce the death of Mrs. Haskell, wife of Mr. Robert Haskell, K.C., M.P., which took place suddenly last night, owing, we understand, to heart failure."

Lummond read it several times, and a little shaft of sympathy tried to pierce his heart, fast becoming atrophied through want of use.

When he arrived at the house, full of plans and prospects for his own future, determined on a long talk with Rachel which should result in a speedy marriage, he was shown into her small sitting-room and left to wait—five minutes—ten minutes

—a quarter of an hour. Then one of "the children" looked in and said, "Rachel 's sorry to be so long. She says she 'll be down directly, but I don't think she will."

"Why not?" Lummond said, frowning. "I 've come on purpose to see her."

"She 's crying about Mrs. Haskell, you know."

"Tcsh!" Lummond walked to the window frowning, and the child disappeared.

He heard the door open again presently, but it was to admit Mrs. Cremayne.

"I 'm sorry, Luke," she said quietly, "that you are kept waiting, but I don't think Rachel 's fit to see you. She 's frightfully cut up about this."

"H'm! It 's unfortunate it should have happened just to-day," Luke said bitterly.

Mrs. Cremayne seemed not to hear the bitterness and continued her own line of thought. "It 's awful," she said. "She was with her all yesterday, and left her perfectly well and in the best of spirits. It 's a most terrible shock to us all."

The thought that struck Luke as she spoke was this: "So that 's the reason I did not get an answer quicker—she was with the Haskells!" Aloud he said, "Yes, it 's very sad. I suppose you 've seen his new appointment?"

"Poor man," Mrs. Cremayne murmured. "I think that makes it worse. I can't think what he will do without her. They were everything to each other."

"Oh! I should think he 'd marry again. After all, she was always paralysed, you know."

But he got no response. Mrs. Cremayne had fled the room.

Lummond, irritated beyond endurance, opened the window and stepped out on to the lawn. He looked round everywhere with that hopeless longing for the one person he wanted to see, and only saw the General.

The General came up to him, but at once spoke of the Haskells, asking if he, Luke, had been able to learn any details before leaving town.

Luke shook his head. "I really came down to talk about my own affairs. I 'm afraid I 've not chosen a very good day."

"Well, well, Rachel's very cut up, poor child. But I daresay she 'll see you. Try and comfort her. They were great friends, you know, and she was with her till six o'clock last night."

Lummond bore it as best he could, but he was bordering on frenzy. "Not a soul cared—not a soul—about him. They thought of no one but the Haskells. And he was a thousand times more in want of sympathy than a man who was only losing a sickly invalid of a wife, while he, Luke, was in danger of losing everything—simply everything, and nobody cared.

They went in to lunch and he got a message that Rachel would see him afterwards.

He went to her room, and found her standing

where he had stood by the window, and he went up to her.

She was very white with pink heavy rims to her eyes. She put out her hand and Lummond took it.

For him, in that almost breathless moment, earth was crammed with all the possibilities of Heaven, but alas! his eyes were blinded so that he did not see, and if the angels prompted, he did not hear, for he did not take off his shoes.

He only stood there, beside her, far more hopelessly paralysed than ever Ruth had been. He was in the presence of grief and sorrow; yet, so soon are the delicate senses blunted by contact with things not pure and good, he had not the most elementary idea of what to do.

It seems incredible that he did not take her silently in his arms and let her cry out her heart on his shoulder; incredible that, considering all the circumstances of the case, how he had come down to persuade her to marry him without delay, he should not wrap her round with such show of affection as would leave no doubt in her mind that he really cared; incredible he could so disobey the laws of harmony when finding his world vibrating on this day to the notes of sympathy; incredible he could still only strike the discordant key of his own individuality. Yet this he did, heedless of the melodies and the everlasting chimes that try and fail to penetrate fortresses built within walls of pride, the stones whereof are mortared together with vanity.

Lummond went back to town in the evening with hell in his heart. He had had his chance of Heaven, had seen the open door, he knew; and in refusing to step in, he now found himself shut out.

Rachel could not give her mind to anything he had said. He might just as well have stayed away. He had sat on one chair, and she had sat on another while he had tried to talk of the future; but it was all such a farce. She had only nodded her head, as if she did n't care what he arranged, and when he complained, she said, "I 'm sorry, dear, but I don't feel I can think about ourselves to-day," and though she was miserable, he was much more miserable, because a "little root of bitterness springing up troubled him."

So he went away when Tom came in with news which he thought Rachel wished to hear.

The news was second-hand from Sir James Bagot, who had been sent for by Robert Haskell at midnight.

Briefly it was this: Robert had come in late with his latch-key as usual, had heard a commotion overhead, and looking up, had seen Ruth leaning and laughing over the banisters.

"I 'm cured, darling! I 'm cured!" she called out. And he ran up the stairs two at a time to catch her in his arms, kissing her as she swayed towards him.

Then he thought she fainted, and carried her into her room. When Sir James came, she was dead.

She had literally died of joy.

When all was over, Robert longed but for one thing—that was to get away.

Had it not been for his new appointment and the necessity for resigning his seat and seeking re-election, he certainly would have gone without any delay.

As it was, he had to stay and work rather harder than before. His friends did all they could to help him, and the kindly sympathy of opponents was shown by the fact that, under the circumstances, they refused to fight him, and he was returned to Parliament unopposed.

This was in June. When August came, he was dead beat, but he struggled on, refusing to take advice for his health, till one day he was found prostrate in his room, and after that he had to obey orders.

Nothing less than a tour round the world was prescribed for him. Nothing less would satisfy Sir James Bagot; and behind Sir James was a whole row of political allies intent on getting him out of England and away from the very work they had lately given him to do.

So it was made easy for him to go. And Rachel lived quietly in the memory of that day when he had asked her to come and tell him all that passed on the last afternoon she had spent with his wife.

Rachel found it more than difficult. To be face to face with a man who in the eyes of the world

knew only success, to see him bowed with a profound grief which she shared, to have to speak of it out of a full heart, and yet to preserve the dignity of friendship throughout, was a task to test the strongest.

She did see him, and she promised to write to him. Why, Heaven knows, save that he asked her and she could refuse him nothing.

He was splendidly brave. He looked fine as he sat there talking to her—so sorry for her, so sorry for all who loved his Ruth, yet so glad if it had to happen, that it had all happened just as it did happen, that she had felt no pain, no worry, no anxiety, only a perfect happiness in knowing his prayer of many years had been fulfilled.

And when Rachel left him, she took away with her a little book that had been Ruth's, also a graven image in her heart that she worshipped—and not ignorantly.

I must not think of thee; and tired yet strong
  I shun the thought that lurks in all delight—
  The thought of thee—And in the blue heaven's height,
And in the sweetest passage of a song.

Oh, just beyond the fairest thoughts that throng
  This breast, the thought of thee waits, hidden yet bright;
  But it must never, never come in sight;
I must stop short of thee the whole day long.

But when sleep comes to close each difficult day,
  When night gives pause to the long watch I keep,
  And all my bonds I needs must loose apart,

Must doff my will as raiment laid away,—
  With the first dream that comes with the first sleep
  I run, I run, I am gathered to thy heart."

Alice Meynell.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE VULGAR TONGUE

"IT is only with Renunciation that Life, properly speaking, can be said to begin,"—thus spake Carlyle, and presumably knew what he was saying.

That being so, we ought to find ourselves only now setting out to be really interested in the Ruths and Roberts, the Toms and Marys and Rachels, and hosts of others who have learnt the great lesson of life, for whom the rod of discipline can be more frequently laid aside.

But just as in the old Bible stories we read with such zest of the falls and temptations, the trials and snares of those who set out on a thorny path with their faces towards Jerusalem, so do we follow our fellow-travellers of to-day, our Ruths, who have lived and suffered and died and, maybe, have risen again. We can go with them so far; we may even have learned in their presence to take off our shoes; but after that, when with the next evolution we find "they have also ascended"—then, alas, we can only stand gazing.

Therefore must we turn back to earth and to

Lummond, and see him pursuing his own line of thought with his attempted line of action.

He had arranged his affairs, public and private, and now only waited for that deferred talk with Rachel which would see the near fulfilment of all his plans, and the distancing of all his former worries.

He was so busy with his new work, and with all he had to do, that some time elapsed between his last visit to Flittenbridge and his next. However, he decided it was as well, as it would give the family time to get over their "hysterics" regarding the Haskells.

The more Lummond thought of that day when he went down primed with good intentions towards Rachel, the more he marvelled at his own forbearance in putting up so long with a people whose ways and manners were so at variance with his own. It seemed to mark afresh the strength of his own affection for Rachel, that, in spite of the many drawbacks of her family, he had really stood firm for so many years and had wanted to marry her so eagerly that at one time he would have run away with her if he could.

He liked to think of that. He was glad to be able to remind Rachel—if reminder should be necessary—how it was her refusal to do as he wished that was the sole cause of the trouble later between them. Had she married him years ago when he wanted her to, Mrs. Effells by the dozen might have crossed his path and received nothing more than

the attention demanded by politeness. This he would certainly mention if the occasion offered.

When the desired interview came off, he found Rachel at first more like her old self and less inclined to balk him at every turn of the conversation. They talked quite pleasantly in the studio, Anna being temporarily absent, and Rachel admitted her willingness to marry him as soon as he found himself ready.

Lummond therefore proceeded to unfold his plans, that she might dimly understand the workings of his mind. At the end of an hour he had explained many things, foremost amongst them the fact that he did not now intend to embark on a house when he married. His idea was to live as the Savoy Hotel. He had already seen a set of rooms that suited him in every way. This arrangement was preferable to a small house and would save him no end of bother. Surely Rachel agreed it was a brilliant idea? She would have no housekeeping to do; in fact she would have nothing to do. It was quite as much for her as for him he had made this arrangement.

Rachel's nod appeared so little satisfactory that he began to enlarge on the subject. He told her he had come to this decision by reason of his frequent visits to Flittenbridge.

"Here," he said, "I always see worries and bothers. Your father's life never seems to me worth living. Something is wrong from morning till night; somebody is calling to him or calling

on him everlastingly to see to things. From roof to cellar a house is really a nuisance. Now, I intend to be saved all that sort of thing. My work will bring as much worry as I can conveniently contend with, and when I come home, I mean to have peace and quiet at any price. Do you understand, little woman?"

Rachel said, "Yes," but with a glint of something in her eyes that escaped Luke's observation.

"The food 's very good, too—that 's one object I had in mind. It will be much more satisfactory for you to feel that when I come back at the end of a long day I shall be certain of a good dinner."

Rachel said, "Shan't we get rather bored with such sumptuous fare every day?"

"I don't think so, and if we are, I can always go to the club, and you can have something in your room."

"Luke, I don't think I 'm going to like it."

"You must like it, my dear. I 've taken the rooms for seven years. Now, don't make difficulties, there 's a good child. It 's settled now, and no more to be said on the matter."

"How many rooms are there?"

"I' m not quite sure, but I know there are enough—just for you and me. We don't want so many after all, and then there are all the public rooms where you can sit if you like. Why, you 'll be in clover! Then you can be out as much as you want to—not that I 'm going to keep a carriage for you. I can't afford it, and even if I could, I

don't think I should. I've seen what happens in your family too often to run the chance of being put upon like that myself!" He spoke in a semi-jocular tone, and Rachel looked at him as though he were rambling.

"What can you have seen?" she said.

"Your father put on the back seat over and over again when your mother has chosen to 'pick up' a friend. You don't know how these things strike an outsider. You all have ways of that sort as a family. It's in the blood, I suppose, and for that reason I'm going to guard myself carefully from being imposed upon unawares."

He laughed as though he had said something humorous.

Rachel did not laugh.

"No, as you say, one doesn't know how one strikes an outsider. Tell me what else you have arranged?"

"I haven't arranged anything. I'm only just telling you how I think we shall best get along. One great point is, there'll be no need for me to make you an allowance. I shall pay for everything. You won't want any money, because you won't have any expenses. I'm going to save you all financial worries, but if there's anything you can't put down in the bill, you can keep an account and some day, if you're good, and I feel inclined, perhaps I'll pay!"

"No, that's very generous——"

"You needn't speak like that. You'll have

nothing to complain of. I 'm arranging everything for you. I shall work very hard. I shall go off early and come back late, and by-and-bye, when I 'm rich, it will all be to your advantage!"

"Break it gently, Lu, but how early in the day am I to lose you?

"I don't know; that depends."

"What does it depend on?" She leant a little forward with a half-smile towards him.

He answered deliberately with no smile, "I never know whether sometimes you pretend to be dense, or whether you really are rather stupid. Is it a pose?"

She shook her head.

"There 's only one thing it can depend on; that is, how I feel. If I feel like going out early, six, seven, eight, I shall go out at six, at seven, or eight. If I feel like going out late, late I shall go. It just depends."

Rachel paused before answering. "Well, perhaps that will be for five days in the week; the other two can be my days. Saturdays and Sunday now, we might do things together."

Luke shook his head. "My dear child, time enough to talk of what we are going to do together when we are together. Do let us keep to important things and get our plans cut and dried."

A dog whined and scratched outside the door, and after a moment Rachel got up and let him in. "That reminds me," Luke continued, "you won't be able to take any of your menagerie to London.

I hope you understand that? None of your dogs or cats or birds. They would n't do in a hotel at all."

"Never mind, I can leave them here or at the Manor. We shall often come down there, I suppose."

A smile fled over Lummond's face. "Don't you be too sure. There may n't be any Manor to come to, or any Flittenbridge for the matter of that. But nothing 's settled yet, so you need n't worry."

"Lu," Rachel spoke with a deadly fear in her heart. "You won't part with the place without giving Dad a chance, will you?"

"I make no promises—no promises whatever. It 's a very expensive house. We shall never live here. I 've seen quite enough of your way of living to see that."

"Have n't you enjoyed our way of living? Have n't you liked coming down here?"

"Oh yes, but after all it is my house, you know, though your people have been very nice about it. You must n't think I 'm not grateful because I don't gush all over the place. You really must try not to be so touchy, Rachel, or we shall never get along. Now, what do you think of my scheme? Savoy Hotel, if you please! What do you think of that?"

"It 's an alluring prospect!"

"I should think it is! Then smile about it! Do for goodness' sake show a little pleasure! Why, some women——"

"I know, Lu, the sort of people who only know that side of you, who let you talk like that and applaud and make you think you are rather fine. They are quite welcome to all they get. They get the 'you' that I don't want, but it's no use bringing me the 'you' that's good enough for them. If I marry you, I want to be your wife, your companion, your friend—not a bit of furniture."

"H'm. Some women—" Luke said again——

"Yes, some women would ask nothing better, I know that, just as some women would sooner walk on the shady side of a man's life than not walk with a man at all. I would n't! But I 'm sorry for interrupting. I 'll wait till you 've finished."

"I have finished."

"No, I think not. There 's something you 've forgotten."

Rachel closed her eyes momentarily. Should she make one more effort to break through this zareba with which he had surrounded himself, or was it not only useless but hurtful to both of them? She would try once more.

"When I said I would see you to-day, it was because I thought you were coming down to speak to me very differently from this. I thought you were coming to——"

Luke interrupted rudely. "To grovel, I suppose, to play the repentant 'Prodigal.' Go on, I knew you 'd make a scene if I came."

Rachel hesitated; then she rose, standing straight

before him. He lay back, a martyred expression settling on his face.

"There need be no scene," she said, "but that little letter you sent me—the nicest I have had for a long time—made me think that like the man you mention, you too 'had come to yourself,' and if so, I was ready to marry you. As it is, I have only one thing to say; that is—'Good-bye.' "

"Good-bye!" Luke jumped to his feet. "Good-bye! I don't know what you are talking about. You don't dismiss me like that. Good-bye, indeed!" He stood glaring at her like an angry beast.

"You have made it impossible for me to say anything else. You have dismissed yourself."

"What do you mean? I don't follow you!"

"You said just now you wondered if I were really stupid. I sometimes wonder if you are really human!"

"Thank you, but I don't understand!"

Rachel stamped her foot, her eyes blazing, though her voice was quiet. "No, you don't understand. You 've been so blunted you can't feel the unkindness, you can't perceive the cruelty it is after all these years to come in such a fashion and offer me—this! It is n't like a man; it 's like a fiend. Now, please to let me pass."

"No, you don't," getting between her and the door. "I want an explanation of this. Somebody's been making mischief. Who is it?"

She shook her head without looking at him. "I wish you 'd let me pass."

Her fingers were moving nervously, for she felt she had suddenly come up against something in life, some bed-rock for which all previous experience had left her unprepared. Luke, watching them, said savagely, "I suppose you 'd like to kill me!"

"No, Lu, but I would with all my heart I could strangle the devil that 's in possession, and set the real you free!"

"You 're very kind! But if there 's one thing I 'm more determined on than anything else, it is to preserve my own identity from any of your manipulations."

"Will you say 'Good-bye,' and go?"

"No, I won't. You 've got to listen to me. If everything was always done in your way, of course it would be all right, but you 're not going to have everything in your own way. That 's just one of the first things a man has got to teach a woman when he marries her."

"I think you must be a relic of the Stone Age!"

"Ha! That sounds very clever, no doubt, but you don't take me in. Now," he laid his hands on her shoulders, "I 've had enough of this. I 'm going to marry you, because I 've always said I would and I never go back on my word. You 've kept me dangling about long enough. Oh yes, I daresay it 's been my fault in some ways, but

still you would n't have waited unless it had suited you."

"Luke! You must be mad!"

"Mad!" He shouted, "I should think I am, to want to marry a woman who 's never cared about me, and a nagging woman, too. That 's what you are, a nagging woman with an abominable temper, besides being hysterical."

Rachel wrenched herself from his grasp, walked straight to the fireplace, and pealed the bell.

What she would have said had it been answered immediately, she probably did not know herself. As it was, Anna opened the door, and Luke walked out automatically. Anna followed him, speaking to the servant they met half-way. Rachel was left undisturbed.

The storm had burst, the tempest had raged, and in the lull that followed the closing of the door, Rachel was only conscious of her own palpitating emotions. Everything was one incoherent blur. She still heard Lummond's insistent voice reverberating against the walls, still saw the picture of their future happiness smashed to the ground and trodden by his foot, still felt the throb of her own heart as it had leapt up to meet him when she thought the real Lu had come to claim her at last.

And then the bitter disappointment that reigned amidst the wreckage of it all. And the sense of revolt as Lummond spoke of the future, the dawning consciousness that he would take advantage of

her patience in past years to try her still further till she was goaded to fury. The entire absence of the Spirit of Love in coming to her and speaking in the manner in which he did. The difference in their ideas concerning married life. His plans—so up-to-date—for them to separate as much as possible. Her plans—so old-fashioned—for them to be together.

> An ear that waits to catch
> A hand upon the latch,
> A step that hastens its sweet rest to win.
> A world of care without,
> A world of strife shut out,
> A world of love shut in.

That was very much her idea of home, but it did not seem to fit somehow with the Savoy Hotel.

She sat on with her eyes wide open, burning painfully, because they had no relief in tears. The discordant sounds ceased gradually, and the pulse of things resumed its normal beat.

The last words that Lummond had flung at her repeated themselves in her brain, and with them came a dim sense of having heard them before in a different setting, conveying a different meaning.

She tried to throw her memory back to something far away that yet existed in conjunction with those words, and she lost herself in the thick darkness that temporarily obscured remembrance. Then she closed her eyes, for suddenly it had come to her——

"You thing of Spirit—Fire and Dew!" That was it! That was what Mr. Haskell had once said long ago.

She repeated the words, and lay there thinking. After all, it was the same idea—just the same idea.

"A nagging woman with an abominable temper, besides being hysterical——"

She almost smiled. All the hurt had gone. It was only Robert Haskell's own opinion of her translated into the vulgar tongue.

That was all.

And she fell asleep.

. . . . . .

When she woke, calmed and rested, she saw Anna in the garden standing outside the window. She went across the room and leaning out she called to him,

"Have I kept you out of your studio all this time? Anna, dear, you are good to me, but come in, do come in."

Anna stepped over the sill, closing the window behind him. Then he turned, gazing at her curiously.

"Have you sent him away with a flea in his ear?"

Rachel nodded.

Anna hitched up his trousers and danced.

"The Lord be praised! That 's all I can say. The Lord be praised, my dear! Is he not coming back?"

"I don't think so."

Anna executed a *pas seul* very creditably, considering his age.

Then he pulled up short and drew Rachel on to the sofa beside him.

"I don't think you have any idea what a relief this will be to the family. They 've been very good, Rachel."

"Very good, Anna."

"Your father especially."

"Has he worried?"

"Yes."

"But he need n't have. Two things he knows —I would never marry without his consent and the Bishop's blessing, never!"

"And you would n't have got either! What finally upset the apple-cart?"

"I showed temper and spoke my mind."

"You don't say so? The Lord be praised!"

"Anna, I can't take it like that. I have cared for him—more than for anybody in the world—ever since I 've been grown up."

"Yes, child, I know, but your small hands can't lift a dead weight like that. There 's lots of good work for them to do, but not that."

"They 've failed in the task that was given them."

"Some failures are better than success, my dear. Nobody else has failed with him as you have, because nobody else has tried as you have; and the cause of the failure is very much the same as it was once upon a time, a long while ago, when a very

Great Man, full of power and capable of performing miracles, visited a little town on the sea coast. But He did n't do anything wonderful there. His visit was n't any good to anybody. The reason given was, because the people of that town did n't believe in Him. Are you going to say that that was n't the reason at all, that it was really because He did n't try enough?"

"Anna! How can you dare!"

"Well, there you are!" Anna said. "The servant expecting to be greater than his Master."

By ourselves is evil done,
By ourselves we pain endure,
By ourselves we cease from wrong,
By ourselves become we pure.

No one saves us but ourselves,
No one can and no one may.
We ourselves must tread the path,
Buddha 's only shown the way.

Dhammapada.

CHAPTER XXXV

OUT OF THE MIRE AND CLAY

LUMMOND laid down the pen with which he signed away his ownership of Flittenbridge.

He had heard from his lawyers that they were desirous of purchasing the entire property as it stood, for an eccentric old gentleman, a well-known client of theirs whose name they were not permitted to divulge.

So he agreed to sell the place, and, having done so, regarded that portion of his life as finished.

He stood up, lighting a cigarette. He had finished with law, he had finished with politics, he had finished with Mrs. Effell. He had finished with the Waterses and he had finished with Rachel Cremayne. The only thing now left to finish with was—himself.

He went out, wondering how best he should attain that end.

He had no desire to meet anyone. His object was still, as so often before, to be alone. Consequently, pursued by what he regarded as his malicious fate, he met several of his former friends.

Tom Cremayne, walking with Beryl Adams, passed him with a nod. Luke's lip curled with a sneer.

He paused at a crossing for the crush of traffic and saw the Winyons go by without noticing him.

"That cad!" said Luke, provoked to greater irritation by the memory of a former occasion when Rachel asked him,

"Has he been a cad to Mary; is that why you dislike him?"

And his own answer, "No, but he has to someone else," seemed inadequate at the time, and Rachel did not spare him, but said with a little laugh,

"Better, I should think, for a man to be a cad to anyone rather than his wife."

He remembered he hated her for saying that. He turned into St. James's Square. There, at the corner of London House, he came face to face with the Bishop of Shoreditch.

He would have passed, but the Bishop detained him.

"I wanted to see you, Lummond," he said kindly. "I would like you to come and dine with me quietly some night, if you care to do so."

"Oh!" Lummond was thrown off his guard. "I 'm afraid I can't. I 'm—I'm very busy just now."

"I 'm sorry for that. If you change your mind, I shall be very glad. Any time if you feel I can

be of help to you, I hope you will give me that pleasure."

"Thanks," Lummond said, and moved on.

"Help!" For him! Do successful men get offers of "help" from anybody? The Bishop's words merely meant that he regarded him, Luke, as a damned failure.

A beggar whined after him, "for the love o' Gawd." It seemed the last straw, and Lummond almost spat in his rage and revolt.

Then, Major Adams crossed his path and hooked him with his stick.

"Come and help me buy a motor," he said gaily. "Aunt died and left me a little pot of gold. I 'm going to buy a motor, and learn to drive it myself. It 'll keep me steady, they say!"

Luke laughed. Here was a fellow-sinner on the road to ruin. He could afford to laugh with him and join him, too.

They went on together, not only that day but for many days and weeks and months.

They went for a tour abroad, and the novelty and the excitement did them both good.

Major Adams was honestly making an effort for the sake of the best sister a man ever had in his life. And Lummond was acquiescing in the whim of the moment—neither happy nor unhappy, entirely indifferent to all outside his present, personal, creature comforts.

Then they returned to England and the Major longed for home.

Lummond found himself back in town, stronger physically but weaker morally than before he went.

He had no desire to see the Bishop or anyone. He desired only to be left alone in a state of mind unillumined by a sign of effort or a ray of hope, and therefore gradually he sank into what Rachel once described as a state of "potted gloom."

He never heard from Rachel. He never heard from anyone. He might be dead.

He had dropped out of everything. He knew now he was "no good" to anybody,—he who used to say people were no good to him!

And then one day he saw Rachel. She passed him, driving quickly, without seeing him; but the momentary glimpse of her stirred something that was n't quite dead, only dormant, and an awakened feeling roused him from his lethargy and once more prompted him to action.

He would motor down to Flittenbridge, "blowed" if he would n't, and see how the old place looked.

No sooner said than done. He was craving for a sight of the old familiar haunts, for a kindly look from one familiar face.

He hired a motor and a man for a week, and he visited places he had been to formerly; but he did not go to Flittenbridge; he kept twenty miles always between him and Flittenbridge.

Then on the fifth day, in the evening, when it was growing dark, he turned into what had once been his own Park. He drove slowly, looking with bloodshot eyes into the gathering dusk,

and wanting—he was not conscious what he wanted. He only knew he wanted something that he could n't have.

He got out of the car and walked towards the house. He must see it again, see it as he loved it best, with the lights twinkling in the windows, and perhaps he would catch a glimpse of somebody.

As he stood in the shadows of the trees, it suddenly occurred to him that, having sold the place more than a year ago, of course the Cremaynes were no longer there. But—it only now struck him—he had never had a word from the General on the subject.

Had they gone, hurt and silent, when they found the place had been sold over their heads? Ought he to have written and explained what he was doing or had done? They had lived there for—well, he did not really know how many years it had been their home—but perhaps that being so, he ought to have written. If they were n't there, where were they? Where would he find Rachel?

It was so dark now that he walked right on to the terrace and paused before the dining-room windows, which were still unshuttered.

He saw the lights on the table, saw the servants moving about, and then saw a procession of people he knew come into the room.

His eyes widened and his jaw dropped. He was seeing ghosts of what once had been. There was no doubt about it. He had got rid of the place, but not of the spirit of the Cremaynes.

Rachel's eyes seemed to pierce through the darkness between them and look at him with a quiet reproach.

He could bear it no longer. His hair was standing on end. He was dripping with fright. He believed he was standing on haunted ground, and he turned and fled.

He sprang into the motor and drove from the place like mad.

"To the right, sir! Turn to the right!"

Lummond laughed. Advice to him, from a menial, on Flittenbridge ground!

Crash, bang. Flash, and a flame. Then silence and thick darkness. . . .

Luke had banged his head for the last time against that stone wall at the end of his own way.

The noise attracted the attention of some cottagers not far distant. They came upon the scene and found both men lying on the road, one was conscious, the other unconscious.

They carried Luke and his chauffeur to the nearest cottage. There they recognised the former and went up to the house to report on the accident and to obtain help.

The chauffeur died without recovering consciousness. Lummond was alive, but seriously hurt, and very dangerously ill.

He lay for weeks unconscious in what had formerly been known as his own room in his own house, and when he regained his senses, he was too weak and too inert even to notice where he was.

One afternoon when the day nurse was tired and had a headache, Rachel borrowed her uniform and sent her out for a walk, promising to take her place till she should return.

She sat in the patient's room quietly reading, lifting her eyes now and again to be sure those other eyes were still closed in sleep.

By-and-bye she saw Lummond was awake.

The fire needed replenishing, and she got up to see to it. She noticed the brown eyes watched her vaguely—not the least curiously, and when she paused by the bed he smiled very faintly and closed them again.

Rachel went back to the window and to her book, but she let it fall in her lap as her thoughts drifted over the seas.

She took a letter from her pocket, and read it slowly, from the first word of the address to the last word of the postscript; for there was a postscript, though it was a man's letter.

And the postscript ran thus:

"Colombo—Lady Moyne, in deepest black, has just come aboard with a small retinue of servants. It was a great shock, as I did not know Lord Moyne had died. Was it from his polo accident a few weeks ago? Do tell me all about it if you honour me with another letter."

Rachel sat with the missive on her lap, outwardly staring at it, but inwardly seeing the picture portrayed.

The deck of a ship on a blue, quiet sea, and one man, standing out from all the other men, looking at a woman whose black, trailing draperies cleared a space for her apart from all the other women.

It could be such a dull little picture, but Rachel did not seem to find it dull.

Her eyes grew moist as she sat there, looking apparently into space. Then she folded up the letter and put it back from where it came.

The clock struck four, and she poured out the medicine and gave it to Lummond. He took it from her and drank, but he did not speak and neither did she, only he watched her with more signs of interest than he had yet shown at any time.

The nurse found him just as quiet when she returned. It was evident he had not yet recovered sufficiently to notice a change of people in the continued routine of a sick-room.

Some few days later, however, Lummond suddenly asked her who the strange nurse was who had sat in his room for one afternoon, adding, "She is like someone I used to know."

"It is someone you know," the woman answered.

But Lummond only said "'um!" and relapsed into silence again.

"He is better," said the doctor that day, "very much better indeed. Practically he may do anything now he feels inclined to do."

The nurse went to find Rachel. "You 'd better come up and see for yourself," she said. Rachel came in and took his hand, while they

both looked hard at each other,—she smiling, he puzzled.

Then he said, "But I don't understand. Where am I?"

"Flittenbridge, dear."

"Yes, but—" he passed his hand across his eyes, "how do you come to—be here?"

Rachel sat down on the chair, still holding his hand, and speaking gently.

"I live here, you know. It 's my home."

"But—I—I sold it——"

Rachel shook her head.

"But I did. I sold the place—the whole thing—such a long time ago——"

Rachel patted his hand. "Never mind now. Don't try and remember. It will come back to you by-and-bye. You must n't worry. We are all here just the same. I expect you meant to do it, and perhaps the—the accident stopped you."

Luke shook his head, perplexed.

"I remember quite well," he said. "I sold it to my lawyers for an old gentleman who wanted it. I don't know his name; that was before—before I went abroad."

Rachel tried to think he was still wandering in his mind, and sat on vexed with herself that his words should seem to take any hold in her brain.

"I thought you were a ghost that night. I came and looked at you through the dining-room windows. I knew I had sold the place and yet I saw you all there, and you looked at me and I felt awful.

I got away as quickly as I could and drove off, and that fool told me to turn to the right. Me! As if I wanted to be told my way on a Flittenbridge road! But something went wrong—I don't remember any more."

"No, there is n't any more to remember, because you drove into the stone wall. You probably thought you 'd got to where the road forks, but you had n't and you crashed into the wall."

"How funny," Luke said. "All that fool's fault. He should have said, 'straight on' if he really wanted me to turn!"

Then he smiled at Rachel. "Is it all a dream, do you think?"

Rachel stayed with him some time talking, and afterwards went down to the studio and told Anna of the curious impression Luke had about the house.

She repeated several times that "of course it could n't be true. He might have meant to sell, but was n't it awful to think what a near thing it had been?

"Anna, it would break Dad's heart to be turned out of Flittenbridge. He loves the place after all he has done for it!"

Anna nodded. "I think you may set your mind at rest," he said. "He won't be turned out."

"How do you know?"

Even as she spoke, she knew,

"An old man—whose name was not given."

"Anna! Anna!"

As the days went on, Lummond seemed to improve mentally faster than he did physically.

"There 's such a lot I want to say to you, Rachel," he would urge when she told him she could not stay if he talked so much, as it was n't good for him. "Such a lot, because I have n't talked to you for ages, you know. I could n't. I don't know why. Did you mind, Rachel?"

"Yes, dear, but I always knew that some day you would have more to say to me than to anyone else."

"I 'm glad you always understood. I want us to get married quite quick, just as quick as ever we can. Then I 'll tell you all about it, and we 'll go and live quietly at Bexhill. I think I went there once. It 's a nice place, and I can play golf all day and then I shan't worry you, shall I? I 'm an awful worry, are n't I, Rachel?"

As Luke seemed to have lost remembrance of that last conversation in which she had wished him "Good-bye," Rachel also decided to ignore it for the present, and only answered him by murmuring, "Bexhill!" rather faintly.

"Yes, I took a fancy to the place; that 's why I want to go. You must like it, Rachel. Promise me you 'll like it, or we shan't be happy there. I don't want you to be unhappy, Rachel!"

"No, dear, I 'm sure you do n't. We must talk about this again when you are stronger." And then she left him smiling and at peace, while she went away with "Bexhill" sitting heavy on her heart.

The doctors were not satisfied. The improvement was maintained, that was all they could say, and by now they wanted a great deal more. Rachel refused to be depressed. She was so glad about so many things that she was full of hope for the future.

One day she heard sounds coming from Lummond's room that she had not heard for a long, long time, and, as she paused to listen, the nurse came out, and seeing her, laughed softly.

"I 'm sure he 's going to get well," she said. "Something is making music in his heart. Listen to him!"

Rachel pushed open the door and looked in. Luke's hands were playing an invisible instrument, and he was singing—weakly, it is true—still he was singing.

When he saw her, he smiled and flourished his hands and raised his voice a little more, in welcome.

" 'Out of the mire and clay,' Rachel listen, 'Out of the mire and clay, Thou hast lifted me up. Thou hast lifted me up, and set my feet upon a rock that is higher that I.' 'Higher than I!' Surprising, is n't it, Rachel, that I could really admit there is something higher than I? Old girl, come here, close. I want to hold your hand. It is written for you! 'Out of the mire and clay, thou hast lifted me up.' Don't you like that?" (Chromatic scale crescendo.) " 'Thou hast lifted me up, and hast set my feet on a rock, that is

higher, high—er than I.' Is not it lovely, Rachel? I think it 's the best thing that has ever been written! We will have it the first Sunday I get to church. What are you thinking about?"

"I don't believe," Rachel began.

"Oh, tut!" he laughed. "Not correctly quoted, I suppose. What does it matter? If it 's wrong in the letter, it 's right in the spirit; but get the book and see, please!"

No petulance was heard in the voice, and Rachel rose with a feeling of almost light-headed joy.

"It does not run so in either version," she said, standing and reading the words with murmured comments from the listener.

"'I waited patiently——' "

"So you did, old girl, you were sweet. Go on."

"'Out of the horrible pit?'"

"Oh, poor, dear woman! No, I don't think we will have that. Rather overstating the case."

"'Set my feet upon a rock and ordered my goings.'"

"So like you, that, Rachel, is n't it? You always wanted to order my goings, did n't you? Yes, you know you did, darling. You used to put up sign-posts all along the road, and lots of them were marked dangerous, and I would n't attend, would I? Next, please——"

"'A new song in my mouth——' "

"Yes, I like that—and it 's true, is n't it, Rachel? This is a new song for me to sing—a Thanksgiving! That 's what it shall be, old girl, when I 'm up and

about. Now let us set it to music. I like my version best—me all over! 'The rock that is higher than I' appeals to me more than having my goings ordered. Don't you think so, darling?"

Rachel sat beside him again, while he sang weakly with his eyes on her face,

" 'Out of the mire and clay.' Bass chords of the organ there. 'Thou hast lifted me up, Thou hast lif-ted me up'— Sure you like that chromatic bit? I shall leave out the feet. Sounds better like this: 'Thou hast lifted me up.'—See how that connects the minor key with the major? —'on a Rock that is higher than I.' When his feet are clogged, he naturally sings in the minor key, but when he gets on to the rock, he changes his tune. Then, poom—poom—poom—some grand chords before this new song. We ought to have a boy's voice coming from the roof, like this." Luke tried to sing falsetto, but he only succeeded in producing such a curious sound that Rachel laughed partly from amusement and partly from pleasure in the situation.

"I 'm tired."

Quite suddenly the life and movement left him. All his muscles relaxed and he closed his eyes.

Rachel went to the bell and rang twice for the nurse, who found him exhausted and inclined to sleep.

Some hours later she called Rachel upstairs. His breathing had become difficult and he was

asking for her. She sat beside him and put her hand on his.

His eyelids flickered and she caught a whispered "Darling." Then he slept again.

A great fear took possession of the woman's heart. Was she going to lose him in this way, just when he seemed to be most worth having? Surely, surely, he was going to live.

An hour passed; then he opened his eyes and fixed them on her. "Rachel!" His tone was half-frightened, as a child's might be. She knelt down beside him and slipped an arm under his head. "You won't go away, will you?"

"No, dear, I won't leave you."

He sighed contentedly, and she touched his hair with her lips.

"I did love you! Darling, I did love you, and I did try, Rachel, but I know I failed."

"All right, dear. It 's all right now." She murmured the words soothingly between soft kisses and held him tight in her arms.

One member of the family after another looked in and understanding he was asleep went away.

The nurse came and nodded to her from the door and went back to her room.

The agony and strain of the position passed into that numbing sensation which yet brings no relief, and still Luke slept.

By-and-bye the night nurse came beyond the door and, stooping, touched Rachel's shoulder.

'I am so stiff," she whispered back, "I don't think I can move ever again."

"Try."

"I 'm afraid of waking him."

'You need not be afraid——"

They unclasped her arms, and the numbing sensation got into her brain and lulled it into semi-consciousness for a long, long time.

And so it is, as it ever was, that an exceeding bitter cry from a man's death-bed wiped out all the years of torture and agony from the woman's heart.

"Darling, I did love you and I did try, but I know I failed."

So pathetic, so sweet, so cheap.

To have disappointed her, cheated her, betrayed her trust, broken her heart, squandered her youth, belied her faith—was all as nothing before those few words, "Darling, I did love you, I did try."

Rachel said them over and over to herself. No bitterness, no resentment remained—scarcely even the memory of what she had endured. Love demands a price and she had paid gladly, willingly, would do so again if only to hear him say he would try, and she who had loved so much, because she had so much to forgive, so much, now felt a dim longing to be herself forgiven, because she had failed to understand how, in spite of all appear-

ances to the contrary, he had really loved her, had seemingly tried to do right, and in admitting his failure, had won the saving grace of humility.

There is no place where Earth's sorrows
Are more felt than up in Heaven.
There is no place where Earth's failings
Have such kindly judgment given.

Faber.

CHAPTER XXXVI

EARTH CRAMMED WITH HEAVEN

AT the opening of Parliament in February of the following year, Robert Haskell was back in his place.

He was welcomed on all sides by friends and opponents, both legal and political.

He was bronzed and burnt and brown, and because he did not wear his heart on his sleeve, they said he had quite got over his loss, and was not only likely to marry again, but that rumour kindly provided him with a second wife, who would be entirely suitable in that she was gay and young and a widow.

The rumour did not reach Robert Haskell, but it tickled the pretty ears of Molly Moyne and made her smile as she wound her long veil round her throat to keep it out of the way, because it was "tiresome and caught on things," as well as because it was infinitely becoming.

She sought the company of Lady Winyon very frequently. "When you are quiet and alone, dearest, or only just one or two intimates, I don't mind

seeing a few people," she would say, "people who knew me—before—like the Haskells, you know. I was so fond of his wife, poor man!"

And Lady Winyon confided to Rachel she would sooner see Sir Robert dead than married to their friend Molly.

Rachel heard what was said, but it did not really distress her. She could not for one moment believe that Ruth was already forgotten, and if she were, if a woman like Molly Moyne could usurp Robert's thoughts to any serious degree, then Robert was a different man from the Robert she and Ruth had known.

As a matter of fact, the obvious fascinations of the widow jarred on the man who had admired them in the wife. When she was securely married to Lord Moyne, Robert, in company with many others, had found her most alluring, but when Lord Moyne was dead and in his grave but a few months, then those enticing ways seemed to fastidious eyes as if they outraged a sense of decency or betrayed a want of feeling in the delicate rule of the fitness of things.

Rachel threw herself into art more and more as the year went on. A younger sister encouraged her absence from society altogether by taking her place therein very efficiently, and Rachel, therefore, worked in the studio with Anna and produced a really fine bit of modelling,—a "Father Time," standing over and holding a sun-dial, at which he was sadly gazing, while a little fat child on tiptoe

beside him, had kicked over the hour-glass, and was straining up, laughing, to try and see what the old man saw as he looked down.

Roughly scratched on the base were the words: "A man's reach should exceed his grasp; else what's a Heaven for?"

This in plaster Anna insisted on sending up for exhibition in the following spring, and tried hard not to show his pride and pleasure when it was duly accepted and shown in the New Gallery.

He went to town a dozen times and never missed wandering round the object that drew him in the central hall.

He would sit and listen to the remarks of passers-by, gloating over those that betokened intelligent observation, sarcastically contemptuous for the multitude of *Dummköpfe* who passed it without a word.

Then one day he strolled in and heard something that made sparks flash in his eyes. He heard someone ask the price of the sun-dial; he heard an official reply that it was sold!

Anna almost danced—with his feet, that is. Everything else was dancing, his heart and his mind and his soul. He went up to the official and asked it if were true. Hearing it was so without a doubt, he went out and telephoned to Rachel to come up by the very next train and he would meet her at Waterloo without fail. "Urgent."

Rachel arrived, wondering. Anna told her in the cab, as he took her in triumph to that

almost sacred spot, and then stood back to watch.

Rachel looked at the group, the man and the child, realising that the dear creation of her brain had passed into the keeping of other hands. She half-smiled and then turned to Anna. "I love it so, I 'm almost sorry!" There was a lump in her throat and her voice quivered.

Anna nodded, for he understood.

"Who bought it?" she said presently.

"I don't know. Somebody who knows what' s what. I 'll go and find out."

He went away and returned with an imperturbable gentleman in a frock coat.

"This is the artist," said Anna. "Miss Cremayne."

'Indeed," said the gentleman with a slight bow. "I 'm pleased to be able to tell you," in a voice that was slow and full of loftiness, "that your Sun-dial was bought yesterday by Sir Robert Haskell, M. P. I don't know if you are aware he is also the Solicitor-General, and quite a connoisseur in his way. He has been in studying it many times. I pointed out its merits about a week ago, very unusual merits, if I may so say, for a lady's work. The idea is quite out of the common, and the design is beautifully executed."

"Thank you," Rachel murmured.

"I don't know," continued the imperturbable one, "whether you are at all acquainted with Sir Robert, but——"

"We have met," said Anna.

"Ah! Quite so. He——"

"How do you do!"

Commonplace words, but a magical voice. The Solicitor-General shook hands with Rachel and Anna, nodded to the imperturbable one, and said, with his eyes on Rachel, "I can't keep away from this. I had to come in to see if it was still here!"

They laughed.

"How could you, how could you buy it? Where are you going to put it?"

"In my garden, Mademoiselle." Rachel looked her surprise. "In my garden of the future," Robert said.

Several people had now gathered round, seeing that the Sun-dial was evidently become an object of attraction, and as they stood there, whispers passed from one to another.

"That 's the artist, that old man there, and that 's the lady he 's sold it to. You can see she 's pleased to have got it, can't you?"

"Don't push so, my dear. Who 's the good-looking man, as you are so clever!"

"Oh! that 's her husband, I expect."

"Well, I like him!"

The trio chiefly interested moved away, smiling outwardly and inwardly. Robert asked the other two to come down to the House with him and have tea.

Rachel refused, saying she must go and see her

people and tell them her news. They would be so pleased.

"You are such a busy lady," Robert said. "It 's impossible ever to have a word with you nowadays." He ran his eye—a critical eye—deliberately over her hat, her hair, her face, her dress, down to the point of her shoe. *Femme artistique jusqu'au bout des ongles.* "Will you come and dine?"

"I 'm afraid not. We are going down to-night, are n't we, Anna? Tom is staying with us, you see."

"Why not go down by a late train and dine with me first?— Seven-thirty, if you like."

Anna turned to Rachel. "If that would be convenient to you," he said courteously, "I should like to accept very much, as I want to see Dawson and should probably catch him at the House then."

"Rather," said Robert. "May I expect you both? Then I 'll meet you in the lobby."

"Thank you very much. It's extremely kind of you. *Au revoir.*"

So they parted to meet again.

And after dinner Anna went away with his friend to have a smoke and a talk, and Robert took Rachel out on to the terrace.

They walked up and down, watching the river boats, noticing the tan-coloured sails, the barges like black shadows on the water, the patches of sunlight still lingering on Lambeth Palace, and

then they leant against the parapet in a silence permissible to real friendship.

"I 'm going to ask your advice, if you 'll give it me." Robert did not turn to her. He gazed on the water, speaking rather slowly. "You know we are likely to go out of office before long. There 's bo nd to be an election next year anyway. It may come much sooner than most people think. That being so, as we are hardly likely to be returned to power, I, of course, should go back to my ordinary practice. Now set against that, my profession, which I love, I am faced with an alternative. I have got a chance of changing my whole career. It has come quite as a surprise to me, due really to some talk about my travels the other day, and will, I fear, be a bomb-shell in some quarters. I was rhapsodising over my visit to Ceylon, and some one said, 'We 've got to appoint a new Governor there'; whereupon, with my usual humility, I ventured one or two opinions. Result, I was asked privately yesterday, in the most gratifying manner possible, whether I would care to chuck law and politics here and accept the post of which I seemed to possess so vast an amount of knowledge!"

"The post of Governor of Ceylon!"

"Yes, extraordinary, is n't it?"

They turned, then, facing each other, Rachel's eyes shining, her lips parted. "But I thought Ceylon——"

"You thought quite right. It 's the Blue

Ribband of the C. O. In offering it to me, the Government are going contrary to all traditions. I 'm neither a soldier, a sailor, nor a Peer of the Realm, but for various reasons, I can't explain now, they wish to offer it to me."

"What are you going to do?"

"That 's what I want you to tell me."

Rachel's gaze returned to the water, and the man's eyes were rivetted on her face.

"Is that why you bought the Sun-dial?"

"Yes."

Then she laughed, glad of the excuse, "You don't want advice!"

"Yes, I do. I want yours." He seemed to smile and yet be grave at the same time. "The reason I ask you is, that if I go, I could not possibly go alone. I can't live alone. It 's unbearable! I 'd always meant to talk to you about it, some day, but this idea makes me ask you now."

His glance swept over the houses and the river and the landscape, back to the immediate foreground—to her.

"Rachel, shall we chuck it all? And if I go, will you come with me?"

Less than a week later the papers announced in one column the appointment of the new Governor of Ceylon, and in another column that a marriage between Sir Robert Haskell, K. C., M. P., and Miss Cremayne would take place immediately and very quietly.

"Very quietly?" said Society. "Not a bit of it, my dear. Bidden or unbidden I 'm going to see that wedding unless they bolt the door in my face."

. . . . . .

Rather more than three years later, Mrs. Cremayne in her sitting-room at Flittenbridge was looking over her afternoon letters. Her face was wreathed in smiles when she lifted it at the sound of footsteps outside.

"Reginald! Come here, dear, I want you."

The General came in and stood at attention. "At your service, Madam, as always."

His wife indicated things in her lap. "Letters from Rachel! They 've been having such fun and seeing heaps of friends from England. She sends us photographs of the children. Look at your grandson and that darling baby!"

The General grunted to show he was wholly unmoved by the wealth of emotion in his lady's voice, but he looked at the photographs a long time.

"Yes, jolly little chap, is n't he? Like his father, don't you think?"

"My dear, I think he 's like you!"

"Like me?" The General's voice betrayed a feeling.

"Yes, very like you; the upper part of his face, don't you see?"

The two heads, both silver gray, bent together

over the little face that looked at them from its cardboard setting. They peered through their spectacles, and then they shared a magnifier, for nature's eyes were dim.

Presently Mrs. Cremayne said, "There 's a letter for you as well, from Robert." Then they both lapsed into silence, reading and still smiling, till the General gave a low and prolonged whistle, and looked up frowning.

"Robert writes me a queer thing," he said puzzled. "He 's come across some letters of poor Geoffrey Lummond belonging to an old woman. It 's a queer story altogether."

Mrs. Cremayne twisted round in her chair. "Not the same old story?"

"What old story? I did n't know there was one!"

"Oh, my dear!" Mrs. Cremayne tweaked the glasses off her nose and proceeded to re-state the rumour as she had already stated it many years previously.

"Don't remember a word of it."

'I daresay not. You did n't pay much attention. You knew it was n't true, and you said Geoffrey Lummond was all right; he belonged to your club."

"Ah, yes, so he did."

"You said it was a cock-and-a-bull story; so we did n't give any heed to it. I think we both forgot it."

"Well, my darling, it seems I was wrong.

Robert 's got some papers and letters given to him by a native woman, signed by Geoffrey Lummond, and the English of it all is (for they were written in her own tongue) that unfortunately there occurs this sentence: 'Her ladyship is dead. The child lived but a few hours and is buried with his mother; therefore I intend to take you and the boy to England and bring him up as my son.'"

Silence fell in the room as the General's voice ceased. Mrs. Cremayne looked transfixed with horror; then she said, "Luke!" with bated breath.

"I 'm afraid so. Looks like it. The stories seem to tally right enough. What a mercy, my dear."

Mrs. Cremayne bent her head slowly. "What a mercy!" She repeated the words absently. "It explains so much."

"That 's what Robert says. He and Rachel 'feel it explains so much!' They have agreed to burn the papers, there being no Luke to send them to, which, of course, was what the woman wanted."

"Oh, poor Luke! Fancy if he 'd ever seen them! Poor, dear boy!" The lady's eyes were moist.

"How about my daughter? Fancy if she 'd married him!"

Mrs. Cremayne nodded meditatively. "It was extraordinary, Reginald, when you come to think of it, how the wedding always was prevented."

"And a good thing, too. I can't pretend to be sorry."

"No, but we were very fond of him, dear, and Rachel loved him. I feel now he never had a chance, poor boy!"

Something bright dropped on to the baby's robe. Mrs. Cremayne removed it delicately with her handkerchief, hoping that the General did not see, but he did, and came and put his arm round her.

"Don't be sad, old lady. She 's very happy now."

"Very happy now," the voice murmured into his coat, "and your wife ought to be happier still, for she 's never been given things to bear like this. You have always——"

"Oh, my darling. Come and let me put on your shoes, and we 'll go into the garden." He kissed her, growling at the same time. "No one 's immaculate, you know, and I——"

"Maybe, dear," Mrs. Cremayne sighed softly, "but you 've always made it possible for me to think so."

Think when our one soul understands
The great Word which makes all things new,
When earth breaks up and heaven expands
How will the change strike me and you
In the house not made with hands?

R. B. Browning.

And if ours has been the lot, the common lot, only to walk the Via Media *and yet to find it open on to the* Via Crucis, *to mix unnoticed with the multitudes in the valley of decision, to climb no heights with Robert Haskells, plumb no depths with Luke Lummonds, it may still have been ours to see a Heavenly Vision.*

And if we have not been disobedient to it, but have learnt to take off our shoes, then can we turn with smiling eyes and understanding hearts to our companions and gladly help the blackberry pickers on the homeward way.

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